



















**JUST BACK  
FROM RUSSIA**



by RENÉ MacCOLL

# Just Back From Russia

77 DAYS INSIDE THE SOVIET UNION

DAILY  
**EXPRESS**  
PUBLICATION





**TO  
LORD BEAVERBROOK**

## Acknowledgments

I am indebted to Mr. Reginald Morse Charley for the photographs which appear in this book. For a reason which is explained later, I was unable to provide photographs of my own. Mr. Charley's admirable pictures have partially filled the gap. (He did not, unfortunately, travel, as I did, outside Moscow to any great extent.)

The visits to Moscow of Mr. Charley and myself coincided last spring. He is an engineer and was there on a business mission.

Mr. Charley was not content, however, to spend his time on business only. For the past twenty-seven years he has been the Secretary of the Baptist Church in Staffordshire. And by special arrangement he delivered a message from the Baptists of Britain to their co-religionists in Russia before a congregation of over 2,000 persons in the Baptist Church of Moscow last March. The message was delivered in English and later translated into Russian by the head of Russia's Baptists.

. . . . .

My grateful thanks are due also to Mr. Charles Klensch, the Bureau Chief of the International News Service in Moscow. By way of the United States Air Force, and Bureau Chief in Denver, Colorado, and Madrid for INS, Mr. Klensch arrived in the USSR in January of this year—one of the youngest men ever to receive the highly prized Moscow assignment.

"Chuck" Klensch's avocation is photography; and it was his eye for a camera shot which produced the picture which embellishes the jacket of this book.

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## **PART ONE**

# **MOSCOW**





## CHAPTER I

### A Room with a View

It is two o'clock in the morning in Moscow. I am sitting in my high-ceilinged suite in the Metropole, which is far from being No. 1 on my hit parade of the world's hotels, wondering if I should go to bed.

A huge naturalistic oil-painting hangs above me, protruding from the sitting-room wall at an angle. All paintings and nearly all wall mirrors in the USSR are hung to incline outwards. They never hug the wall. To hang them flat is regarded here as "old-fashioned".

This painting is a still life. The dead pheasant is so life-like you expect it to take off at any moment. The sporting gun hanging from its hook is a miracle of elaborate reality. Every picture in the Soviet Union is like that. It must either "tell a story" or else reproduce with painstaking fidelity some Russian scene—Birch Woods in Winter, Larch Woods in Spring.

The USSR is the country of the loathsome lamp, and my room is no exception. Who can have designed these monstrous objects? A vast lampshade the colour of a cape gooseberry umbrellas outward over an ornamented bronze base which for sheer weird taste would be hard to beat. Its twin is at the other side of the room, but the shade there is electric blue.

The expensive-looking carpet screams at the mustard-coloured tablecloth and together they scream at the raspberry-tinted sofa. Heavy plush curtains mask the alcove which contains my bed, the teed-up pillow covered with a lace doily, and beyond that is the dingy bathroom where the cockroaches play.

Upon the table stands the selfsame drinking set that I was to encounter all over the USSR. In Siberia, in Kazakhstan, in Uzbekistan, and, I have little doubt, in Vladivostok, this fitting

is standard issue. It consists of a cut-glass water jug standing on an oval glass base with two small tumblers. Nearby are two cut-glass goblets.

A knock on the door. A grey-haired maid, smiling amiably, hands me a cable. Moscow is three hours ahead of London, and so Fleet Street, where it is still only eleven p.m., is in full activity. Soviet telegrams are not enclosed in envelopes; they are folded forward and the privacy of the contents ensured by two small patches of blue sticky paper dabbed on to the corners.

It looks as though I shall have to file another story before turning in. Now the complications start. Not only is Moscow the only city in the Soviet Union from which press messages can be cabled to the outside world, but the only spot in Moscow where you can do this is at the Central Telegraph Office on Gorki Street, for that is where the censors are.

There's a little snow about still (this is towards the end of April) so I huddle into my greatcoat and set off.

As I wait for the lift to come swimming up to the fourth floor the depressing atmosphere of the Metropole enfolds me like a miasma. The newest of the Moscow hotels is the Sovietskaya, but its marbles and mosaics and petrified forest of pillars are reserved for the really important "delegations", such as the Scottish Coalminers en route to Peking.

("Delegation" is a word much in use in the USSR. It covers any group of visiting firemen, whether from abroad or merely from the provinces. It is a convenient alibi to explain a room shortage. "There are being so many delegations just now. . . ." And it can also explain why every better-grade restaurant in Moscow can be closed, suddenly and without warning, to casual diners—"Reserved for the members of the Railway Workers' Delegation tonight, gospodeen". . . .)

Much the most attractive hotel in Moscow is the National. I waged a long, bitter and finally triumphant battle to get myself transferred to it. The trouble was that by tradition visiting newspaper correspondents have always been lodged at the Metropole, and the authorities thought it wayward of me to want to move. The National is traditionally the businessman's hotel.

It was seven long weeks before I won that particular fight,

and in the meantime I had to suffer the Metropole. The place is huge. It was built towards the end of the nineteenth century, primarily to accommodate the Tsarist merchant princes on their Moscow jaunts. I cannot believe that its atmosphere, even in those days, ever helped to induce a romping spirit. Today it is one of the dreariest places imaginable. It sprawls across most of an entire city block, and in Moscow a city block is a big chunk of territory. It badly needs—as indeed does nearly every other building in the city—a new coat of paint.

I could not find out the size of the Metropole staff but it must be considerable. In the Soviet Union you don't simply retrieve your key from the hall porter and make your way to the lonely upper regions of your hotel. You are discreetly checked and watched and surveyed by many pairs of eyes. First you pass the policeman at the door, one of a squad who is on twenty-four-hour duty outside all Intourist hotels. When he gets to know you he gives you a snappy salute and may wish you good night.

Immediately inside is the doorman who gives you a scrutiny far from casual. Next the desk of the "Hotel Administrator", always a woman, who may give you a masked smile, a curt nod, or even a friendly greeting. Then the lift operator, who, no matter how long you have been in the hotel and how often you have told him or her which floor your room is on, always waits to have the memory refreshed.

Then on all the landings the landing administrator, or "floor matron" as I thought of her. Relays of landing administrators sit at the desk around the clock, while behind them the radio sets whimper and chatter and roar, for music while you work is by way of being a Russian "must". Choirs, solos, band music, newscasts, patriotic poems, and so back to choirs.

The landing administrator has usually a small cohort of hangers-on about her desk, dozing maids, chatting underlings, whispering lieutenants. As you approach the desk with a murmured "Posholista" (Please) she opens a drawer, inspects its key contents closely, looks up again to make sure that it really is you, intones the number of your room, then lifts your heavy key from the drawer and hands it over.

Her landing is spacious, like all else in the Metropole. It

is rich in cacti and ferns and rubber plants and other green things in pots. For Soviet taste seems in a variety of ways to have fixed upon the British seaside lodging house at the turn of the century as the beau ideal of progressive socialism.

The potted plants are perched on high pedestals with long outward curving legs. Among them are some huge vases of unattractive design. There is a suite of overstuffed chairs in royal blue. The ceiling is decorated with an elaborate design of trompe l'oeil. And on the wall a portrait of Stalin or Lenin, or sometimes both of them together.

One quickly gets to know these pictures, for there are endless copies of a few key portraits and one encounters them again and again all over the country. One favourite is of Lenin studying some notes as he sits in a chair with a white dust cover on it. (In summertime all chairs in the Soviet Union have these dust covers placed on them. It gives an odd effect at first, as though one is in a house which has been abandoned by its owners.)

Then there is Stalin, white-tunicked and standing against a background of great agricultural effort, with lines of tractors stretching off to the horizon. Lenin exhorting the soldiers, sailors and peasants in 1917. And both together, sitting with their arms cast loosely around one another's shoulders, looking into one another's eyes with delight as they agree on the terms of the first Five Year Plan.

(And of course there are the Stalin-Lenin statues. In the remoter parts of the USSR these become crude and cheap-looking. I suppose they are mass-produced by some factory, for you see hundreds of identical statues, silver-painted, turning up at railway stations in Azerbaijan, Parks of Culture and Rest in Uzbekistan and airports in Turkmenia.

(Once when I was on a conducted tour, a French businessman sidled up to me as we paused near yet another bronze group of Lenin and Stalin. "Do you know France, monsieur?" he murmured. I nodded. "Then you are familiar with the all-pervasive Dubonnet advertisement?" Again I nodded. "Well-l-l-l . . ." with an expressive shrug in the direction of the statues.

(So far Malenkov is not widely portrayed. In fact pictures of

the new chief of the government are so scarce as to be remarkable when one does crop up. Why? I was given two explanations: that it is Malenkov's personal choice to play himself down and not try to be another Stalin; that Malenkov has still to win his spurs, and that his portrait will only get general billing when he has proved to the popular satisfaction that he has done so.

(For a time I couldn't think why it was that a certain kind of lamp with a narrow, flat, decorated shade, and a special sort of teaglass with a cheap metal base seemed so familiar. Where could I have seen them before? Then I looked up at the wall of the room I was in—and saw both the lamp and the glass of tea.

(For they appear in yet another famous portrait of Stalin—one which must keep a small army of hacks busy copying it for wide distribution. In this one Stalin is depicted working late in the Kremlin, lamp at elbow, tea at hand. This same design of lamp and tea glass are nowadays to be encountered everywhere you go.)

When you have said good night to the floor administrator it is not quite your last. For scattered about the winding corridors and unexpected vistas of this barrack-hotel are the desks of assistant floor administrators, and maids. A French lady who was visiting Moscow not long since struck up a casual acquaintance with a Russian man during a visit to the opera. After one or two subsequent meetings he avowed that his interest in her was more than platonic, but on learning that she was staying in one of the Intourist hotels he sighed deeply and remarked, "Ah, then unfortunately the clandestine visit to your room is being impossible." I saw what he meant.

The lift finally comes up and I get in. The one-armed, grey-haired man in charge gives me a long, hard look and we start down. On the ground floor I pass the silent accounts dept. (more cape-gooseberry-tinted lamp shades) and the door of the dining-room, through which I can hear the sound of the dance band playing its last tune for the night.

Out into the square where the great classic façade of the Bolshoi Theatre looms up in the moonlight. Not much traffic about at this time of night, but the few cars still around are all honking their horns incessantly. Next to Havana in Cuba Moscow is the noisiest traffic town that I have ever been in.

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The centre of Moscow is a series of great deserts linked to one another by thin fringes of buildings. The deserts are streets and squares—streets of a wideness which make the Paris boulevards almost resemble lanes by comparison. Enormous squares, great cobbled or asphalted prairies, which can only be crossed by certain prescribed routes. The shortest way from A. to B. may be a straight line—but the straight line is not usually yours to take.

The Telegraph Office is about seven minutes' walk from the Metropole, a little way up Gorki Street. Gorki is one of the streets which has been fantastically widened, whole buildings being moved back twenty or thirty feet in the process.

There aren't many people about so late. A few women street-cleaners, wearing long felt spats—vilinki—and heavily bundled up against the cold, are trudging home, besoms in hand. They have worn, lined faces and I wonder what they think of things. They all wear scarves or shawls about their heads—as do hundreds of thousands of Soviet women, for the female hat is still a rarity in this country, especially outside Moscow and Leningrad.

I pass an open manhole and glance into its depths. Far below I can see a middle-aged woman, also wearing felt spats and a scarf, performing some sort of drudgery in the drains. She is one of Moscow's sanitary workers. But is this considered a seemly job for women? I ask a Russian acquaintance next day. "Of course," came the firm reply. "In the Soviet Union all work is glorious. Undoubtedly this woman is thinking that it is being a privilege for her to be a sanitary worker."

I walk past the public door of the Telegraph Office and down a side street. Opposite a church which long ago has been put to some other use I turn in at the doorway marked "International Communications". Up a short flight of green-carpeted stairs and past a cloak-room where a sour-looking old woman gives me the grim ghost of a nod. (The cloak-room in the USSR is a great institution and not in the least optional. Wherever you go you must leave your hat and coat in the cloakroom, especially at the theatre, the ballet or the opera). While I was in Moscow I attended the private showing of a preposterous film in which Clark Gable essays the role of an American news-

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paper correspondent who marries a Soviet wife but is not allowed to take her with him when he leaves the USSR. Gable makes his way back to Russia, borrows the uniform of an MVD officer and walks boldly into the theatre where his wife is dancing. Unfortunately the good Gable wouldn't have lasted a moment in reality, for he is depicted as still carrying his MVD cap in his hand as he makes his way to his seat (That single small slip would have been quite enough to advertise him as one woefully unfamiliar with Soviet ways.)

Upstairs at the Telegraph Office I find my luckless colleagues correspondents permanently stationed in Moscow. Theirs is an unenviable existence, predicated on the basic fact that they must wait for *Pravda* to come out before they can go to bed. *Pravda* may come out at any time between 1 a.m. and 5 a.m. When it appears late one can rarely make out why, for it may come out late even when there is no apparent reason in the form of startling news.

The Anglo-American correspondents doze or play cards or write mailers for their papers. The interpreters, men and women, whom most of the correspondents employ full-time, are also sitting around looking sleepy, but ready to jump into action when *Pravda* finally appears.

I sit down and start to write my story in answer to the cabled query I received at the hotel. There is an immense amount of fiddling and fussing involved because it is necessary to make four copies of every sheet that you write. This involves feeding into one's typewriter four sheets of copy paper and three sheets of carbon paper. When you are in a hurry this process can become maddening.

When your story is finished you keep one copy and take the remaining three copies to a little window. You rap on the frosted glass and it is opened by a surly-looking woman who gloweringly accepts your bundle of paper, checks to see that you have signed every piece in the right place and takes it off to the censors. The censors you never see. I don't know how many there are, how old they are, or even whether some of them are women. The censors' verdict is final. No argument is ever allowed.

But in the past few years there has been a signal concession.

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Nowadays you do at least get back one of the three copies you hand in, and this shows exactly what has been cut. At one time the unhappy correspondents simply filed into the blue. For all they knew the whole story might have been killed—they remained none the wiser.

But how long the censors are going to take over their deliberations is anybody's guess. An article sometimes emerges from the censorship room in a few minutes. Or it may take hours—occasionally days. The supposition in such cases is that it has been referred to higher authority.

The censors evidently have a good knowledge of colloquial English and their cutting is usually done with fair intelligence. But no correspondent is ever happy working under a censorship, and while wartime censorship, concerning itself merely with security matters, is irksome enough, the present-day Soviet censorship is far wider than that. For basically the Soviet censors are seeking to extend to the messages of the foreign correspondents the same defensive mania for putting the USSR in as good a light as possible as I encountered among officials everywhere during my stay. It is a prestige censorship. Anything, even a triviality, which might be construed as a knock or a criticism, comes out. The result of course is that my articles were systematically pulled out of kilter; any complimentary material was automatically passed; rarely was adverse comment let through. The censor is there as a builder-upper, to try to place the Soviet Union in as favourable a light as possible for the outer world.

Here are some examples of the way the censors' mind worked where my own articles were concerned.



## CHAPTER II

# Eternal Vigilance

THE fact that Harold Wilson, former President of the Board of Trade, who was on a high-level business visit to Moscow while I was there, was arrested for taking a photograph of a woman carrying a child's tricycle in busy Pushkin Street was anxiously hushed up by the censors. The episode was laughable and Wilson himself was much amused, especially as only the night before he had been privileged to spend nearly two hours with Anastas Mikoyan, Politburo member in charge of trade, in his office in the Kremlin.

One of the more unattractive features of existence inside Communist Russia is that all citizens from early childhood have it impressed on them, sometimes forcibly, that it is their duty to be "eternally vigilant" against foreign enemies. If a Soviet citizen sees, or thinks he sees, something suspicious he must go and tell the nearest militiaman (and usually he doesn't have far to go).

It is not a question of choice—he *must* do so. Neglect to act as a snooper may have the most unpleasant consequences.

The result is that these 200 million people have been turned into a nation of informers, busybodies and nosy-parkers, eager to gain credit for an arrest, desperately anxious to get on the right side of the police by being the first to turn in a sinister foreigner.

As children at school they have it drummed into them that the motherland may at any time be threatened by "interventionists" or "fascist adventurers", and to some extent history backs the theory up. Art galleries and museums all over the USSR have sections devoted to the "period of foreign intervention" just after World War I, when a British Army was lying at Archangel, British support was going to White General

Denikin in the south, and the Americans were giving some help to Admiral Kolchak, operating in the east.

This period, when it was touch and go for the Bolshevik revolution, is recalled as if it were yesterday. The rulers of Russia make it deliberate policy to keep the picture of the hostile foreigner—especially the Anglo-Americans—always before the eyes of their people.

On top of this carefully fostered suspicion and fear is the security mania which afflicts all Soviet citizens today. "Map" is practically a dirty word inside Russia; and when, in Alma'Ata, I asked the highly intelligent hotel proprietor (who had lived in the place for the past fifteen years) how far away the Chinese border was, he replied with a straight face that he had no idea. (The answer is about two hundred miles.)

The first thing which most visitors ask for on arrival in Moscow is a street map or plan of the place, just as one naturally would on arrival in any new town. There is none to be had. Official reason: "Our great city is changing and expanding so fast that it would be constantly out-of-date." Real reason: security. There is no Moscow telephone directory to be had. Reason: security. If you don't know the number you want to ring in Moscow it is just too bad. You can't look it up in the directory, and it is no use asking the Central Exchange; they are shocked at such a request.

Not long ago a Soviet Air Marshal accepted a luncheon invitation to a foreign embassy in Moscow. Such an event is a rarity and the hosts did their best to make the occasion a success. But social contacts between Soviet officials and foreigners, especially Westerners, just because they occur so seldom, always give the impression of being forced.

The Westerners are out to please at all costs; sometimes in fact I think their attitude becomes a little fawning. The stolid, phlegmatic Russians sit or stand around, still-faced, polite but taciturn, waiting for the next question or remark, effortlessly retaining the initiative.

And, of course, nothing controversial may ever be hinted at. All the topics that really matter, the huge questionmarks of the world today, must be rigorously avoided. It reminded me of considerate relatives at a family gathering who must keep

always in their minds the knowledge that Cousin Edward only came out of prison last month. At all costs the talk must be steered away from anything which could remind poor Edward of his convict days—but there's no knowing what that dreadful Aunt Millicent may say if she has a third cocktail.

So it's small talk all the way when the Russians are there, and at this lunch-party the chit-chat during most of the meal was devoted to a laboriously innocuous discussion on fishing. With the dessert came a pause, and to break it someone said impulsively, perhaps, to the guest: "And is your office in the Air Ministry, Marshal?" To which the Marshal returned, deadpan: "The Air Ministry? And where is that?"—tantamount to a British civil servant asking an interlocutor where Whitehall is. . . .

But if the sight of a map makes a Soviet citizen squirm, a camera causes the gravest possible disquiet. A man wearing Western clothes *and* carrying a camera? He must be a spy. In February 1914 the police issued an edict considerably relaxing the regulations about cameras. Since that date foreigners have been allowed to take photographs freely, provided they don't try to make pictures of military installations or such things as bridges and factories. As a precaution I always carried a copy of this edict to produce if I were challenged while I had my camera with me, but although several times women—always women—pointed to the camera and made some grumbling comment, it never came to a showdown.

Harold Wilson was less lucky. There he was in Pushkin Street in the centre of Moscow in broad daylight and he snapped the woman carrying the child's tricycle. At once two civilian busybodies rushed to the nearest policeman and reported him. And the policeman, who apparently was unaware of the edict issued by his own commissioner, asked Wilson to accompany him to the station.

Wilson was treated with every politeness, offered cigarettes and so forth; but oddly, instead of letting him go at once with an apology, they held him for some time and tried to take the camera away.

When it finally sank home that they had arrested a VIP and one moreover who was on excellent terms with Mikoyan,

Wilson was released. The apologies came later, and it was intimated that the penalty for the over-zealous policeman would be stiff.

The censors killed the story.

One of the episodes that made me angry while I was in Soviet Russia was the visit of Sir John Hunt, the Everest leader.

Obviously, if Hunt was taking the trouble to come all the way to Moscow, then it was desirable that his lecture should be heard by the widest possible audience. Accordingly the British Embassy asked the Soviet authorities if some large public hall could be made available for the lecture, the idea being that Hunt's running commentary on his admirable lantern slides of the ascent should be translated by a first-rate interpreter.

The request was put in to the Soviet authorities weeks before Hunt was due. No reply was received until the eve of Hunt's arrival. It was then stated that "not enough notice had been given and no suitable lecture hall is available".

This remarkable attitude illustrates an unlikeable trait in the Soviet character—an essentially grudging approach to any feat performed by foreigners; an unwillingness to give credit where credit is due—if the credit is due to a non-Russian.

Since the Soviet authorities started claiming Popov as the inventor of radio, Polsunov as the man who beat James Watt to the discovery of the steam engine, and so forth, they could not very well admit that the British were first up Everest.

So they were not going to let Hunt loose in a public lecture hall. The result was that Hunt was reduced to giving his talk in a room at the Embassy—to which twelve handpicked Russians came along.

I listened to the lecture and then drove back to my hotel reminding myself that if I let my anger show in my story it wouldn't stand a chance of getting through censorship. So I tried to cool off and then sat down and wrote the following cable.

I give my message in its entirety. **BUT ALL THE PASSAGES WHICH APPEAR IN ITALICS WERE THOSE CUT OUT BY THE CENSOR.**

"Moscow, June 11th.—Just twelve Russians—yes, a round dozen—heard Brigadier Sir John Hunt deliver his famous

lecture on the ascent of Everest tonight. They were a little handpicked group that included several well-known Soviet 'Alpinists' as mountaineers are called in Russia, who turned up at the British Embassy. Leading them, in the grey uniform of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, was Mr. Slavín, head of the Ministry's British Affairs Section. And among them was Mr. Blagoveschensky 'State Inspector of Alpinism', who gave Hunt the badge of an honorary '1st Class Alpinist of the Soviet Union'.

*"But how come? Why this minute Russian representation in an otherwise all-diplomatic audience not more than fifty or sixty strong? Why not the big hall—the big audience? Why not a slap-up affair? Why so hole-in-corner? Well, it's hard to explain, but the fact is that there were certain difficulties. No big hall seemed to be available. And the authorities found that they hadn't got quite enough time to organise a public meeting. So there we are."*

"Just recently the official *Sovietski Sport* newspaper devoted an article to the Everest climb and indicated pretty plainly that it didn't think that there was so much to make a song and dance about. The article pointed out that the main requirements were simply experienced climbers, lots of capital and plenty of porters to cart along the supplies. The climax of the climb is described this way: 'Then an Indian flag was installed by Tensing on the crest of the highest peak in the world' and the article goes on to say that the 1952 Swiss expedition left behind lots of rope ladders and food caches which made things relatively easy for Hunt's men.

"And the author of the article in *Sovietski Sport* demands recognition for 'those unknown coolies, simplehearted,<sup>1</sup> honest and trustworthy to the very end, who defied all hazards while carrying on their shoulders all of the things necessary for the comfort of the gentlemen climbers. After all, who knows what the result of this expedition would have been without the Sherpa Tensing?'

*"The article makes it clear that if Soviet climbers were really interested they could have gone to the summit with much less effort. This rather grudging approach was reflected when another party of Soviet climbers attended the Embassy showing of the Everest film not*

<sup>1</sup> Simplehearted is a favourite word in the USSR. "We are simplehearted people," is the oft-repeated phrase.

long ago. *One of them was asked if he thought British climbers might visit the Soviet Union to have a go at the Caucasus peaks perhaps. His reply was that foreign climbers were not very welcome since a party of pre-war German alpinists abused the courtesy of their Russian hosts by making maps of the region—which were put to use by the wehrmacht in its drive to the Caucasus in 1942. Hunt, unaware of this episode, glowingly suggested to Blagoveschensky after receiving his medal tonight that there should be exchanges of climbers between Britain and Russia. The Russians smiled and shrugged ‘and appeared to accept the idea in principle’, as Hunt put it later.*

“There was champagne first and then we all trooped downstairs at the Embassy to where Lady Hunt was ready with the magic lantern. Hunt prefaced the lecture by saying that it was ‘a very particular pleasure to meet the Russian mountaineers’ and he ‘had wasted no time’ in putting his new badge up in the lapel of his dark blue double-breasted suit. ‘I bring warm and indeed admiring greetings from British mountaineers and the Royal Geographic Society,’ he added.

“Then to the lecture, with Hunt’s modesty, understatement and pleasant sense of humour captivating the audience of foreign diplomats, while the English-speaking Russians murmured hasty translations for the benefit of their colleagues or explained some of the jokes. Yes—as you all know, Hunt is good. Darned good. *What a pity that the authorities ‘had no time to arrange a public lecture’. And what a pity about that piece in Sovietski Sport. Hunt ought to read it—then he would realise that the climb wasn’t really anything to get excited about.*”

I came up against censorship with the first piece I wrote, describing my visit to the Kremlin to attend the opening session of the annual meeting of the Supreme Soviet.

This was the first cut for MacColl (*italics again*): “Ahead of me three uniformed security police—immensely smart and well turned out in grey with red shoulder tabs—converged on the turnstile through which I would pass. *Also three plain clothes characters, one of them wearing the brightest yellow pair of shoes I ever saw.* They saluted with great politeness, took my documents, made a swift telephone call to someone somewhere and waved me on. *The chap with the yellow shoes fell in behind me. . . .*”

The red pencil flashed again a phrase or so later. "It was very quiet inside the Kremlin in the sunshine, and no one around but me and yellow-shoes and the lurking sentries, *who all wore the biggest six-shooters I've seen since I stopped going to Westerns.*"

(The censor here was so keen to eliminate the six-shooters that he forgot to take out the reference to "yellow-shoes", the detective. This was the first time that "yellow-shoes" appeared in my censored copy and must have presented a puzzle when my message arrived in Fleet Street.)

Later on I am describing the scene in the chamber of the Supreme Soviet as I looked down on it from the press gallery: "The MPs seemed on the whole to be a middle-aged lot—many a bald pate glistened under the lights. There was a sprinkling of women MPs, *one of whom yawned considerably.* Blue suits were favoured by the men. They sat at the rows of desks, *and because every now and then everyone lifted their hands simultaneously it reminded me of a large schoolroom—a schoolroom set in the Empress Hall at Earls Court.*"

And finally they didn't like: "Molotov is sitting on Malenkov's left. It is the Molotov we all know so well—*brooding, serious, deadpan and pale.*"

In a piece I wrote called, "Spring in Moscow", the censor get very busy when I came to describe the scene inside Moscow's cavernous Kazan railway terminal—"a very big, high-ceilinged hall" (as I wrote) "densely packed with human beings. But they aren't rushing for the 7.15 and they certainly aren't wearing bowlers. They are sitting or lying around in close-packed hundreds waiting—patiently waiting. *It looks for all the world like a gigantic refugee camp. Families sprawl on the ground, the mothers wearing peasant dress with shawls over their heads; the fathers in knee-breeches and high boots; the children lying asleep. Their belongings are piled around them—battered old cases, and bundles tied up in what look like pillow-cases. Tough, unshaven Soviet citizens from central Asia bite hungrily at salami sandwiches. Unwashed men in shabby clothes make themselves tea with hot water from a communal spigot. Almost no one in the place wears conventional clothes and my own suit comes in for some sharp scrutiny. Hundreds of travellers are lolling on the hard, high-backed wooden pews, some sleeping, others just staring vacantly.*"

Further along in the same piece came this cut: "If there's one thing above all that Moscow in the spring cries out for it's a new coat of paint. *The town looks like London in 1946, and under the searching illumination of the spring sun the flaked, faded buildings look tatty indeed.*"

And (still the "spring" piece): "The whole price business for a foreigner is totally cock-eyed. The Russians—allow us only eleven roubles and twenty kopeks to the pound. *We contend that this is laughable in relation to the pound's real value, and the fact that British Embassy staffers are by special arrangement allowed to have forty to the pound shows what we think the real value to be. The real value is actually higher still—maybe fifty or sixty. . . .*"

You can see that by the time the censor was through, my "Spring in Moscow" piece was all gaiety and joy; it certainly gave an unbalanced version of what I was trying to write.

In one of the last pieces I wrote from inside Russia, down in the Ukraine, the censor cut just two words. They were revealing cuts. I described "a line of patient peasant women, plodding across a vast plain. . . ." This, I explained, would remain in my memory as a characteristic Russian scene.

Out came the word "patient". Why? Is it that all peasant women in the Russia of today are to be represented as *impatient* and on their toes? But I think I see how the censor's mind was working. Perhaps he had by him the Concise Oxford Dictionary, which gives as one definition "enduring with patience". I see the censor, frowning a little to himself, as his eye lights on this. "*Enduring?* This is not good in relation to progressive Socialist principle."

The other cut was when I described the part played by women in the rebuilding of war-damaged Kharkov. "From my hotel window" (I wrote) "I can see a squad of women bricklayers and plasterers, hard at work on a new block of flats."

Out came the word "squad". I suppose the censor in this instance objected to the vaguely military connotation, and felt that, put like that, it sounded as though the women had been rounded up for building duty.



The censors were extremely sensitive whenever I tried to write about the MVD. They seemed not to realise that I was attempting to present that organisation (the initials stand merely for Ministry of Internal Security) on a matter-of-fact basis, and to eliminate some of the mumbo-jumbo that has grown up around the name.

The MVD has its plain clothes branch, of course—but it also has a huge uniformed section. You see its uniformed officers and men everywhere, easily distinguished by the azure tops to their military style peaked caps.

But when, in describing a soccer match in Baku, I wrote that “the score was posted, goal by goal, by two smiling MVD men”, out came the initials, and the phrase eventually appeared in print, rather lamely, as “. . . by two smiling men”. I told of an MVD major, snoring quietly in the seat behind me, during an airplane flight. Of another MVD officer, walking home in Moscow, a string shopping bag full of esteemed oranges dangling from his hand. Both these references were taken out. Can an MVD major never snore? Can an MVD officer never go shopping? Apparently not.

The censorship on discussion of the money situation was particularly galling. Every Westerner who arrives in the USSR, unless he is on one of the free-loading junkets where all the bills are being picked up by the Ministry of Culture, immediately becomes aware of the staggeringly unfavourable rate of exchange. This has been arbitrarily fixed by the Soviet authorities, and there is nothing that anyone can do about it. It is as though we were to say to American tourists coming to Britain “Yes, we know that you think that the £ sterling costs only 2.85 dollars. But you are going to have to pay \$12 for every £ that you buy here. Take it or leave it.”

The whole matter of prices thus becomes unreal—although the exorbitant impact on the foreign visitor to the USSR is real enough. British businessmen visiting Moscow for their firms can draw up to £40 a day in expenses. British Ambassadors in Moscow have a special allowance of over £40,000 a year. Fantastic? Of course, but then the Soviet Union is a fantastic place.

Why do they want it that way? Because it enables them

to pick up big wads of foreign exchange. And it also ensures that only people who have overridingly important reasons for visiting Russia ever try to go there.

The double-standard approach of the Soviet censors was never better revealed than over this question of the exchange rate. Occasionally I would mention in one of my messages what sort of salary or wages were being earned by the individual Soviet citizens with whom I came in contact.

Because of the artificial rate, these salaries invariably sounded wonderful in terms of sterling. A woman museum guide making 1,300 roubles a month is paid—according to the present rate—the equivalent of just under £117 a month. A figure like that always breezed through censorship. After all, did it not tend to provide proof that the USSR is indeed the worker's paradise?

But glance at the other side of the medal. On June 16th I tried to report some of the then current prices in the fruit and vegetables section of the Moscow Central Market. They were: cucumbers £2 5s. a kilogram (2½ lb.); cherries £2 16s. a kilo; strawberries £4 10s. a kilo; tomatoes £5 8s. a kilo. All of this was struck out of my report because it made the worker's paradise sound not nearly so attractive.

Only one of my messages was "killed" in its entirety. This was when, towards the end of my visit, I tried a soberly written and factual report about the serious situation which had then developed in the "Virgin Lands" agricultural project. I return later to this project—a gargantuan effort to step up Soviet farm production in the hitherto remote prairies of asiatic Kazakhstan, which seems to have gone off at half-cock.

No less a finger than that of *Pravda*, the most official of all Soviet Russia's publications, was publicly wagged at those who had fumbled the start of the "Virgin Lands" project. And after that came a rash of the sort of denunciatory letter to the editor which is sanctioned and indeed encouraged by the authorities when it is thought that the time is ripe for unpleasant penalties to be hinted at.

In my piece I mentioned the *Pravda* editorial—but that was not enough to take the curse off what I wrote. There was trouble, real trouble, down in Kazakhstan, and Nikita

Khrushchev, the Soviet Union's present No. 2 man, who sometimes gets so close to No. 1 man Georgi Malenkov that you are apt to suffer from an optical illusion and think that perhaps Khrushchev is really No. 1 all the time, was squarely on the spot. The "Virgin Lands" project is all Khrushchev's. And if it flops Khrushchev will have some very fast talking to do. My tactical mistake was probably to describe the situation as "a crisis". Anyway, the story was scrubbed.

There was another story which got "killed". But that was a far more significant affair than a straight question of censorship. I'll tell you about it later—I still can't think about it without deep anger.

Another subject that was taboo as far as the censors were concerned was the street begging that goes on inside the Soviet Union—where, of course, there is full employment, and the dignity of the individual has been raised to such a pitch that begging ought to be unheard of. Only it isn't.

Beggars plucked at my sleeve in Moscow, in Zagorsk, the famous "holy town" thirty miles north of Moscow, in Kiev, in Baku, the capital of Georgia, and in Tashkent.

Begging went on blatantly and in broad daylight. One morning, while I was on a walk round the Kremlin walls (a traditional stroll for Western visitors, taking about forty minutes) I was solicited for alms by several peasant women a few yards from one of the main gates of the Kremlin. I shook them off, because the night before I had been subjected to a particularly smug lecture from some dedicated communist on how much better life was for the masses in "the humane USSR, where there is work for all, as compared with the harsh and brutal capitalistic nations of the West, where the individual worker goes to the wall". Right (I thought) you too can go to the wall as far as I am concerned. Someone has forgotten to tell you that begging is now unnecessary in the USSR.

The women seemed to be outraged at my attitude, and there were loud grumbles in my wake. Later that day I sought out the self-same communist who had been giving me the build-up of the night before and asked him why there had been these grumbles. "But," he said, "anyone in Russia will always give to a beggar. We are a warm-hearted, generous people. We

never turn our backs on the unfortunates of this world. It shows a lack of understanding to deny them a little gift."

But, I said, if there is full employment nowadays in the USSR; if human dignity has reached a pitch unknown in Tsarist times; if women have equal opportunities with men—why are these women begging in daylight in one of Moscow's main streets?

The censors struck out all mention of beggars. I tried several times—but out it came. In one article I did my best to put it painlessly. I wrote: "There is some street begging which the authorities are doing their best to stamp out." But even that wouldn't do. The notion of begging in the streets, after thirty-seven years of the great experiment in Progressive Socialism is too awful to think about. Certainly far too awful for a western visitor to report about.

Finally, I scored the modest triumph of actually mentioning the fact of censorship in one of my messages—and having it cleared by the censor. The always sensitive Soviet authorities try to play down the censorship because they know that the USSR is one of the few countries in the world which imposes a peacetime censorship and they realize that it is essentially a confession of weakness.

I simply said that the censor, having spotted a slip of mine, in which I incorrectly spelled the name of a Soviet Foreign Ministry official, had considerably inserted the right name for me in my message.

"Rather decent of him," I commented in the story—and the passage went through. Even a Soviet censor is susceptible to flattery.

Letters too are censored as a matter of course. One westerner living in Moscow started sealing the envelopes of his letters with scotch tape. Promptly he received a tart notice from the central post office. Unless the gospodeen desisted from this practice at once his letters would not be forwarded.

Scotch tape, you see, can't be steamed open.

## Walking Round the Squirrel's Cage

ONE of Fleet Street's staple requests to its foreign correspondents all over the world is for a "reaction story". The man in Washington gets a cable reading "Rush reactioner Attlee on McCarthy" and he can oblige without difficulty. In Paris the correspondent receiving an urgent plea for "reactions" on say a disaster to the French arms in Indo-China can fill the bill by dint of a quick telephone call to the Quai d'Orsay or simply by quoting the French papers.

But in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics there are no such reactions. All but a tiny handful of the 200 million people living in the country go about their affairs with only a sketchy notion of what is happening abroad—or for that matter, at home.

When I first reached Moscow, the air-mailed copies of the *Daily Express*, which started reaching me almost at once, contained a startling series of "Russian stories". First the Petrov affair in Australia. Then the Kokhlov business in Berlin—the man who was ordered to kill a White Russian agent with cyanide-smeared bullets fired from a revolver disguised as a packet of cigarettes. And soon after that came the expulsion from London of two Military Attachés at the Soviet Embassy.

All these matters were, of course, big news in Britain. But in the vast vacuum which constitutes life in Russia they might as well never have happened. When the Soviet authorities decided to break diplomatic relations with Australia because of Madame Petrova's departure from the Moscow-bound plane at Darwin, *Pravda* did eventually carry the terms of the official Russian note to Australia. But it was tucked away on an inside page without comment and I

never saw any subsequent reference in any Soviet publication to either Petrov or his wife.

And Kokhlov? Never once mentioned. The Military attachés? Silence. As far as I can make out nobody but a few top government officials has ever heard of Burgess and Maclean. I asked many Soviet citizens if the names meant anything to them. All shook their heads in obviously genuine bewilderment. All, that is, except one. When I mentioned the names to an athletic-looking young man down in Georgia, he replied, "Burgess and Maclean? Are they not stars of the Arsenal team which is to play Moscow Dynamos this autumn?"

It is difficult for people in the West to grasp the completeness of this isolation. The USSR is most efficiently sealed off and nearly all its people accept what their rulers want them to. I think that the notion of the Soviet masses as news-hungry, restless and longing for more information about the "free world" is only wishful thinking.

Whether the Russians try to jam the BBC overseas programmes and Voice of America broadcasts I don't know. But I do know that both programmes are listened to regularly in the Ukraine and in Kazakhstan at least. I know because people in both places told me so quite openly—and more than once I heard a BBC broadcast in progress.

But I doubt that the broadcasts do much good from a propaganda point of view. I think that Soviet citizens listen to them convinced in advance that they are a collection of capitalistic lies or at best "slanted" news, and I would be astonished to meet anyone who had been swayed by them. I would say that BBC and Voice of America broadcasts are listened to in much the same spirit that Lord Haw-Haw was listened to in Britain during the last war.

But the idea of normal "reactions" dies hard in the West. On Saturday May 8th, the day that the Foreign Office announced in London that the two Soviet military attachés had been told to leave Britain within the next ten days for attempted spying, a telephone call from a Sunday newspaper reached a Western correspondent in Moscow.

"Hullo, old boy," cried the cheerful Fleet Street voice,

"you got our cable about the two Russian military attachés? Can you let us have a really good reactioner?" The correspondent gave a rather hollow laugh and said no, he didn't think that he could.

"You mean you haven't written it yet?" went on the Fleet Street man. "Well, can we call you back later? There's bound to be *some* reaction?"

But that was the point—there was absolutely none. Nobody in the Soviet Union except one or two top-level government officials knew about these expulsions. So far as I know, nobody has ever been told a word about them since. "But what are the Moscow evening papers saying about it?" went on the London man. This vision of newsboys running through the streets of Moscow selling their wares on the strength of banner headlines "TWO SOVIET MILITARY ATTACHÉS TO LEAVE UK AS 'SPIES'" was a perfectly reasonable one in terms of life in the West. In terms of life inside the USSR it was fantasy.

The correspondent dutifully rang up the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to ask for a statement on the expulsion. The request was received in amazed silence and then the flat official voice said, "The matter will be referred." That was the end of it. If the correspondent had tried to send any sort of story about the expulsion it would have been killed.

If life in the Soviet Union is a sort of vacuum existence for the casual visitor, the lot of the Western diplomat stationed in Moscow is like that of an industrious squirrel making his circular step-ladder whirl round him while he remains motionless at dead centre.

The diplomats try gamely to contrive a semblance of normal living, but it is an uphill struggle. They all have flats which, while by no means remarkable if they were in any other world capital, are super-luxury by Soviet standards. They have plenty of books. They have long-playing gramophone records (and Soviet music and records can be excellent). But you very rarely find a Western diplomat staying at home of an evening to curl up with a good book.

Almost at once they fall victim to "Moscow malaise", and they are either out at a party every night or else seeing the same

## JUST BACK FROM RUSSIA

old ballet or play or listening to the same old opera for perhaps the thirtieth or fortieth time.

I was in Moscow for only a few weeks, but I found that when I went to the ballet I encountered a set of "western" faces which fast grew familiar. Because of the icy breath from the cold war the Westerners are isolated and driven in on themselves and their own resources. It is a dolefully unnatural existence that they lead.

Imagine what it's like not to be able to go much beyond the outer suburbs of Moscow without getting special permission. Never to be able to mingle with the people of the country to which you are accredited—except as the result of a rare fluke.

Imagine the frustration of being relegated to a tiny circle of other Western diplomatic missions; of knowing that at that party three weeks from next Friday you will undoubtedly meet the same people that you will also meet at that other party three weeks from next Wednesday.

Imagine what it's like, in a city of probably six million people—the post-war population of Moscow is another of those matters which laughably enough are regarded as a military secret—to meet only a tiny handful who will always be the same. Imagine the boredom with which you find yourself slipping into a net of parochial little conversations of the sort which Kipling's Simla produced.

You have to like a colleague very much indeed, I'd say, to spend the whole day working with him in the office at the embassy and then go home at night to the segregated block of "diplomatic" flats watched and guarded by the police, to find the selfsame colleague with whom you have spent your working day right next door to you or else on the floor above.

And if it is hard on the diplomatic husbands, how much worse for the wives. The husbands at least have their work, and Moscow being the key place it is, they can buoy themselves up with the knowledge that they may be doing an important job. But the wife? It is very difficult for a Western woman to live a pleasant life in Moscow in 1954.

All that the average woman sums up in the magic word "shopping" simply doesn't apply in Russia. Shopping is a distasteful ordeal. The stores are overrun by shoving, un-



mannerly mobs. I saw police called in to control the queues on occasion.

Few of the things that one takes for granted in Western shops are available; those that are on sale are often of sad quality, although there are exceptions. Scotch tape, good sewing thread, carbon paper—these are some of the many little things which one takes for granted in the West and which are unobtainable.

Moscow is no fun to stroll about in, if you live there. I didn't like strolling about in it even though I was only there for a short time. It suffers from overcrowding to an almost unbearable degree and huge crowds are for ever swarming about the place. Even on Sundays there is no peace, for the shops are open and that is the favourite shopping day for many people.

The pavements are jammed with a crowd that is no pleasure to the eye. The women are stocky, thick-waisted and dressed for the most part like a bunch of frights. It is difficult to convey to you the dowdiness of the average Russian woman. In the past year or so lipstick, previously frowned on as frivolous, has become permissible, but it doesn't help much. Soviet women buy lipstick of unbecoming tangerine red, and then paint it on their mouths with no regard to the actual configuration of their lips—in the form of a weird little cupid's bow.

The women mostly have severe faces, lacking gaiety or charm. Their eyes are hard, their mouths set. Even were I twenty years younger and a bachelor, I would as soon think of trying to kiss a Soviet woman as a thistle. A witty Frenchman said that since the Revolution he had met attractive Russian women in Mukden to the East and in Paris to the West, but unfortunately none anywhere between these two points.

The plush that is such a feature of Soviet life is, alas, favoured by many women as dress material. (There must be an enormous factory or group of factories turning out this plush by the millions of yards.) These women, who with their short, plump figures need the kindest and softest of materials, don impossible dresses. Some of these crimson or Cambridge-blue garments, which resemble tents fashioned of plush, make you think that there is some outrageous jest afoot, a carnival time perhaps. But no, it is all seriously meant.

The men's clothes are equally unsightly in Western eyes. Trousers are unaccountably cut to resemble those of sailors, with huge bell bottoms. Since the accent in Russia is all on avoiding waste I should have thought that by issuing a decree saying that all trousers must henceforth hew to the stovepipe line the authorities could effect a sensational saving of cloth.

Jackets are short and usually have blatantly padded shoulders. One Western diplomat told me that when he passed on to his Russian valet a Savile Row suit, the first thing the man did was to send it round to a jobbing tailor to have the shoulders amply padded.

Young men in Russia are well built. You see thousands of husky youths and athletic-looking men in their twenties. But as middle age approaches their figures deteriorate with disconcerting rapidity. Red Army officers of high rank all appear to have pot bellies. I wonder if there are any slender Soviet marshals or generals? Or even any thin colonels?

So as you wander Moscow's streets you find yourself engulfed in a pushing, rushing, swarming mob of ill-dressed and rather plain-looking people. There are thousands of peasants about, the women in their shawls and rough clothes, the men in quilted jackets, breeches and high boots. Thousands of men wear caps, to make it plain that they disapprove of "bourgeois" forms of headgear.

There are thousands of uniforms to be seen. These are not by any means all military, but even when you have subtracted all the railway workers or coal-miners or Foreign Office men and all the rest of those entitled to wear a distinctive uniform, a formidably large army element is left.

The soldiers are short but tough and almost invariably healthy-looking young men. They wear rough, shapeless khaki reach-me-downs (the tunics sharply gathered in by a belt) and have cropped heads and tanned faces.

Besides the MVD men with their blue-topped caps, there is a great number of the special Border Guards who have green tops to their caps. I tried once or twice to ask Soviet acquaintances what so large a contingent of Border Guards was doing in the capital, which can scarcely be described as near any frontier, but the answers were wispy.

## JUST BACK FROM RUSSIA

Upon these two units—MVD and Border Guards—rests a great proportion of the power of the Communist regime. The MVD is there to maintain “internal security”. About those initials (formerly the NKVD and before that the OGPU) has grown up a great cloud of sinister mystery and suspicion. Abroad the MVD is looked on as a ruthless, efficient and stick-at-nothing outfit.

The efficiency of the MVD is often open to question. Its stick-at-nothing reputation is probably justified, although it must be provoking for it when such agents as the Petrovs decide to defect with maximum publicity. As to its ruthlessness, it must be remembered that the Russians as a nation are a much rougher, tougher crowd than we are, and practices that we would regard as brutal can be all in the day’s work for the Russians. It is a bit like an amateur boxer brought up on Lonsdale rules, complaining because someone kicks him in the groin during a waterfront bar-room brawl. It all depends on your terms of reference.

Try sometime to get hold of a Soviet map of the USSR. It will give you an entirely different outlook on things. The USSR is almost always shown on our maps as only a section of the whole—“Russia in Europe”, “Russia in Asia”, “Eastern Siberia” and so on. We tend to get a cock-eyed notion of the extent of the country.

Soviet maps show the whole great landmass, looming and impressive. And Europe looks in relation to it like some rather insignificant fringe clinging to its western marches.

But the frontiers of the USSR are enormous. And given these vast frontiers and the Russian mania for security and dread of “infiltration”, it is not surprising that the Border Guards look like an army in themselves.

All over the USSR you can hear the clink of medals—and as with the uniforms, these are not necessarily dangling from military chests alone. Civilians wear them in the street, women wear them in the Supreme Soviet, and fathers of eight, out for a Sunday stroll, may be seen sporting a long line of medals, fading downwards across the jacket in a diagonal line.

The medal and the commendation, the prize, the citation, the certificate, the little hour of glory that can come to any

zealous worker—these are arrangements which seem to the liking of the Soviet peoples and which presumably have their effect in the shape of increased output.

As the hot weather comes—and Moscow gets as hot as any city I have been in—nearly every man discards his jacket and tie. From June on the city is peopled by hordes of men in either ordinary shirts left open at the neck or cheap-looking short-sleeved sports shirts made of rayon. The non-peasant women and girls sport flowered cretonne dresses, invariably loose fitting.

Places where you may cross the immensely wide streets in the centre of Moscow are rigidly controlled, and if you try a "pirate" crossing somewhere else the shrill whistles of the police will pull you back. So you must forge your way along amid this hurrying mob and push across the streets in a congestion of people at which the cars come rushing with their horns going all-out. At the last moment the people in the roadway coagulate defensively into knots and groups, and the mass of cars noses its way through them, horns still nagging.

Among the more attractive spots in Moscow are the Kremlin gardens. This is a strip of park nestling under the pink Kremlin wall, on the side farthest away from the Moscow river. In summer it is rather pleasant to sit there among the trees and flowers, and if one were allowed to walk straight across the square to the park entrance it would take only two or three minutes.

But you are not allowed to do it. Instead you are made to beat your way laboriously round three sides of the square, crossing in the process four of these nightmare-wide, traffic-loaded streets. The journey thus takes nearly a quarter of an hour.

What about a car? Technically it is possible for a foreigner to drive his own car in the USSR—but he never does. You must have a near-perfect knowledge of Russian (the driving test is conducted in Russian), and a mechanical knowledge the equal of a professional chauffeur. Even so, you will never make it. The notion of a foreigner at large inside the country in his own car—and thus almost impossible to keep under systematic surveillance—would give the authorities sleepless nights.

## JUST BACK FROM RUSSIA

Not long since one westerner, a brilliant Russian scholar with a flair for car engines, took his test, and for a time it looked as though history were about to be made. But at the end of the second hour, after he had triumphantly taken the engine to pieces and put it faultlessly together again, the examiner said genially: "And now, gospodeen, kindly tell me, correct to the nearest tenth of a centimetre, what is the inside diameter of the horn of a Pobieda model?"

Back in England I look at what seems a magic display of shops. The profusion of excellent merchandise, attractively packaged; the shop windows bursting with goods of every kind; the well-dressed people doing their shopping at their ease, taking their time. At night street after street of shop-windows brilliantly lighted, crammed with things. Before I went to the USSR I took all this for granted. Now that I am back I see this display of lavishness and riches with new eyes.

For in the Soviet Union shopping is a harassing, dreary ordeal. You are engulfed in a swirling, sweating, ill-mannered, ill-dressed, impatient mob. All those cartoons you ever saw about sales time in the bargain basement come true. And the shops, aside from one or two show places in big cities such as Leningrad, Moscow and Kiev, are sordid and down-at-heel.

Far away from the western USSR, over towards Siberia and other regions of Asiatic Russia, shops such as we know them scarcely exist. There are shabby retailing places, where various sorts of inferior goods can be found, or in the open-air markets and bazaars, an assembly of woeful-looking objects, many of them secondhand. Outside Moscow, shops specialising in one thing only, apart from food shops, are very rare, and even in Moscow there is, for example, no men's shop.

Food shops have their windows filled with imitations—fish, sliced sausage, sides of meat, empty bottles. The idea is not to deceive—the phonics are done so crudely that it is obvious what they are—but rather as a sign of what is to be obtained inside, like an old-fashioned inn sign, or a barber's striped pole. When I asked why they didn't put real food in the windows the explanation was that they did not want to risk it going bad.

The shopping showplace in Moscow is the huge GUM store,

which fills in an entire side of Red Square, straight across from the Kremlin. Every day that it is open, Sundays included, enormous crowds press up the hill towards it and throng its galleries and passages and counters. The number of shoppers daily is estimated at 140,000. The GUM shop has a faint aura of better things, for it was originally built by the rich Tsarist merchants, and even today their handsome tiled fountain still splashes encouragingly in the middle, under the huge glass roof reminiscent of a British railway terminal.

The shop has a sales force of over 1,000 women, and they operate on three levels, for beneath the glass roof it is a triple-decker affair. Monthly sales of some items: 25,000 coats and suits; 125,000 pairs of shoes; 4,000 pairs of galoshes; 1,500 TV sets; 7,500 radio sets; 15,000 wrist watches.

Prices when I was there last spring (they may have come down a bit since, because the Kremlin, besides striving mightily to provide more consumer goods, is also trying to lop prices as well) included: men's suits £55 to £134; winter overcoats £145 to £162; leather shoes with composition soles 6 guineas; silk ties 2 guineas to £3; rayon ties 15s. to 25s.; women's winter coats £72 10s. to £267; women's spring coats £51 to £106; kapron (nylon) stockings £1 10s. to 3 guineas; leather medium-heel shoes £5 15s.; silver-fox neck-piece £135; electric teapot £6 10s.; electric iron £2 12s. to 5 guineas; refrigerators (6 cubic feet) £133; (3 cubic feet) £65; (1½ cubic feet) £56; vacuum cleaners £37.

The quality was considerably below British standards, and markedly so as regards clothes. Bear in mind that the rouble exchange rate is all askew (the Russians insist on it that way) and that because we are compelled to change our pound at 11 roubles and 20 kopeks these prices seem mostly very high.

I bought a Russian camera for the equivalent of £12, just about the cheapest I could find. Back here my friends who know about these things say it is worth about £3. This just about squares with what we consider to be the true value of the rouble, in other words that it is over-valued four times as regards the pound. And this explains why the Treasury allows British Embassy staff in Moscow to draw roubles at the rate of forty to the pound sterling—nearly four times the official rate.

Now here are these very high prices—and the store is jammed morning noon and evening. How come? Where do all these people get their money? The answer lies partly in the fact that the average Russian worker pays only 10 per cent of his wages in rent and income tax together—and so he has 90 per cent left in his wallet. And, as in Britain in '46 and '47, there is not yet an awful lot on which to spend it, although Malenkov is trying to improve matters.

When TV sets become available there is a wild rush to buy (you see the rough-and-ready aeralis in increasing numbers in and around Moscow) and they are quickly sold out. A new atlas of the USSR goes on sale—and is gone within a couple of days. Huge queues wait to buy radio sets—police are called in to stop jostling and brawling among women waiting to buy oranges.

With the money knocking about, that is why the restaurants are always so full, and why it takes a Russian weeks of patient waiting (unless he is one of the privileged few) before he can get into the theatre or ballet. Nearly always, as I made my way through the crowd hanging about outside the entrance to the Bolshoi Theatre, I would be approached by someone—not a tout but an ordinary citizen—with a murmured request for spare tickets, and a fistful of money held up by way of encouragement.

Here are some more prices picked at random in a Tiflis store: plastic razor 1 guinea; shaving brush 30s.; imitation leather handbag (very dingy) 10 guineas; elastic-ended bloomers (bright blue) 30s.; galoshes £2 17s. 6d.; children's shoes £6 15s.; men's brogues £10; boy's boots 5 guineas; a low-swung pram 27 guineas; flowered material for blouses 2 guineas a yard; striped material for men's shirts £2 5s. a yard.

And bear in mind the dreariness of the whole operation. A Western diplomat's wife put it to me this way: "At home, shopping is something to look forward to, something pleasant. Here in Moscow? I grit my teeth and tell myself 'It has got to be done'. We grumble at home about the nuisance of shopping, but after all it is a nice part of the housewife's routine. Here, shopping is more like going to the dentist."

## CHAPTER IV

# The Approach Formal

RELATIONS with Soviet officialdom are of the coldest and most formal. The Russians are a formal people—that was the case long before the Bolsheviks took over. The Soviet Russians are also basically a peasant people, and while peasants have many virtues they also have their drawbacks.

Even Whitehall, well-informed though it presumably is about the way things are in Moscow, sometimes seems not to be able to bring itself to believe that things can be as sticky as all that in the USSR. Now and again the Foreign Office appears to think that, on the lower levels at any rate, some British officials are on something like “old boy” terms with their Soviet opposite numbers and may even be able to settle minor points “over a drink”.

No British official in Russia is ever on anything remotely like “old boy” terms with anyone in the USSR—and nothing ever gets settled over a drink.

This is what happens if someone, however lowly, in the British Embassy at Moscow wishes to discuss something, however trivial, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The British official rings up and says can he come round to see Comrade X the next day.

Comrade X asks cautiously what it is that the British official wants to talk about. That is common form. The British official may or may not gratify the curiosity of Comrade X in advance—but Comrade X is much happier if he knows what is going to be brought up.

An appointment is made. The next day the British official drives up to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, one of the new “skyscraper” buildings of Moscow. All its doors are closely guarded by scrupulously polite but restlessly watchful uniformed



MVD men with revolvers at their belts. The official walks up to one of them and gives his name. The MVD man salutes and gestures to a girl who is waiting just inside the doors.

The girl is probably the secretary of Comrade X. She greets the visitor with a rationed little smile and leads him in silence—for small talk is considered grossly bad form—to the lift. Outside the lift is another MVD man who unobtrusively watches the British official walk into it.

The lift, operated by a woman, takes him and the girl to the floor on which Comrade X has his office. They walk down a carpeted corridor, through an anteroom, the girl knocks on Comrade X's door and in they go.

Comrade X is sitting behind his big desk, but he gets up, comes round, shakes hands, and motions to the visitor to sit down at the little table which, jutting out from the front of the desk in a T-pattern, is an almost invariable part of the furniture of all offices, those of business executives and municipal authorities as well as government officials.

The visitor sits down on one side of the little table, Comrade X faces him, and—if the visitor's Russian is not too good—the girl sits between them at the third side to translate.

The visitor states what is on his mind. The Russian nods impassively. The odds against his giving a conclusive on-the-spot answer are great. However unimportant the matter, he is almost certain to say that it will be considered and the result be made known later on. Then the visitor takes his leave, exits, and is shown back to the front door by the secretary.

There are one or two unusual points about this Ministry of Foreign Affairs—points which I can personally attest, for I paid a courtesy call there when I first arrived in Moscow, and went back again to say farewell just before I left.

It is unlike any foreign ministry or indeed the interior of any other government building I have ever seen anywhere else in the world. It is not a bit like the Foreign Office, or the Quai d'Orsay or the State Department. You never seem to encounter anyone else in the corridors. They are silent, lonely places. No officials or clerks hurrying along with files under their arms.

You never seem to hear any telephone bells ringing. There

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is no buzz of voices, none of the subdued murmur of men at work. While you are with the official you are visiting, nobody else ever enters the room. There seem to be no filing cabinets in his office—only a rubber plant in a pot and one of those familiar portraits on the wall.

The whole thing strikes you as unlikely—a little reminiscent of that eerie ship in *Outward Bound* which turns out to have no crew.

And when you are in the street again you are left reflecting on the circumstance that you have been inside this huge skyscraper for nearly an hour, in the middle of a busy working day, gone up to the seventh floor and down again, and apart from the MVD men, you have encountered just three people—the secretary, the lift girl and Comrade X. Odd.

And another thing you have to get used to in dealing with Soviet officialdom: if you ever hope to get anything done *you must put it in writing*. Nothing at all will ever happen as the result of a telephone call. Sit down, write a letter, then wait.

On the other hand the Ministry staff will never write *you* a letter. You write to them. They telephone back to you.

If you never put anything in writing you are much less likely to get into trouble. A letter written is a hostage. Stick to the telephone and avoid responsibility—that's the slogan of the Soviet bureaucrat.

This dread of responsibility makes it tough at the top, for whenever possible the junior official will do all he can to pass the buck up to his chief. Once I asked a minor Soviet official why it was that Stalin had never travelled about inside the USSR in all the years of his power and why it was that such stalwarts as the late Beria, Malenkov and the others were so rarely seen in public.

I thought I knew the answer, but I got a surprise. This young man was no smart Alec, and he was not, like so many of the Russians I talked to, unbearably smug. He was intelligent and pleasant and in answer to my question he said: "They are too busy."

I looked at him in astonishment. "What!" I said. "I realise that Stalin must have been and now Malenkov must be extremely busy men; but surely they could find the time, if

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they wished, to make tours about the country, allowing the people to see them?"

"No," said my friend. "They live under an almost unbearable pressure of work. You see"—he hesitated—"we in the USSR have a system whereby the chiefs retain a great deal of responsibility for all decisions. Thus they will wish to acquaint themselves with all that is going on, at what might seem, in certain other countries, to be an unexpectedly low level. We believe in the monolithic form of government."

## CHAPTER V

# The Memorial of Granite

WHEN I went to take my leave at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs a few days before I left the USSR to return to England, the official with whom I talked said to me, after an exchange of pleasantries: "And have you anything to complain of during your visit to Russia?"

This gave me my opening. "Yes," I replied. "The affair up in Murmansk."

And this is what I told him: Ever since 1905 Britain wished to establish a war cemetery in Murmansk. After all, ninety-one Allied merchant ships—the majority British—were lost on that terrible "Murmansk run". The ships which got through took £400 million worth of vitally needed military supplies, including tanks, to the hard-pressed Soviet armies. It is possible that these supplies may have tipped the balance between defeat and victory.

The supplies were taken in at a sickening cost. More than a thousand Allied merchant seamen were drowned. So were nearly two thousand officers and men of the Royal Navy on escort duty. Hundreds of other men suffered severe frostbite and wounds. It was a grim and sombre effort to help our Russian allies.

It took nine years before the cemetery was ready for dedication. Of the three thousand Allied dead only twenty-seven bodies were recovered and those were buried at Murmansk. At the beginning of June a small party set out from Moscow. It consisted of a handful of British Embassy officials, including the Naval Attaché and the Embassy chaplain, and representatives of the USA, Canada, Norway and Pakistan.

Remember that any foreigner, however unimportant, who travels about the interior of the USSR, is usually made much

of. As soon as my plane touched down anywhere, local officials would climb into it and greet me while I was still on board. The foreigner almost never arrives at a Soviet airport or railway station unnoticed and unwelcomed.

Therefore the contrast at Murmansk was all the more insufferable. The Moscow party was not met at the station. Nobody paid them any attention. At their hotel there were nothing but glum, sour looks and off-hand treatment from the staff.

The next morning a single local official did turn up to show the visitors where the cemetery was. But as soon as he had seen them through the gate this official hurried off, presumably to disassociate himself from the ceremony.

And so, alone and studiously ignored, this little group of Allied representatives started the dedication ceremony for the dead. About them were the twenty-seven headstones with their rather pathetic inscriptions—"Although you lie so far away you will always be close to our hearts" was one.

The Soviets sent no guard of honour, no bugler, no flowers. They sent nobody. They pointedly turned their backs.

Can you imagine any other nation in the world behaving like that? Most great countries usually show military courtesy to the enemy dead, let alone the dead of their allies.

As I took occasion to remind the Soviet Foreign Office man in Moscow, it is inconceivable that, if the position had been reversed and a Russian memorial were to have been dedicated in the United Kingdom, the Soviet representatives would have been treated in such a manner by Britain—or indeed by any country which believes in behaving with normal decency.

And—putting the matter on the lowest plane—what a chance the Soviets missed for amassing a little much-needed goodwill in Britain! Supposing they had risen to the occasion with the sort of turnout which the French, say, would have provided at such a time.

A little decent respect, a speech, however brief, a guard of honour. A gesture of generosity, a small sign to show some glow of humanity and even of gratitude to the wartime ally. If such an occasion could have been reported in the British

press what a fine impression it would have made. But no. The Soviets didn't choose it that way.

It was a bitter little group which listened to the Embassy padre's words and then made its way back to the hotel. The British Naval Attaché had planned to end his own brief address with the sentence: "I also wish to thank the Soviet authorities for the arrangements which they made for today's ceremony." Not surprisingly, those words remained unspoken.

Next day an American newspaperman who had gone to Murmansk for the occasion, returned to the cemetery with the intention of taking some photographs. He found the door padlocked and boards nailed across it.

The Russians were taking no chances with twenty-seven imperialist agents, even if the agents were dead.

The Foreign Ministry man looked troubled when I told him of all this. He shook his head. It must, he volunteered, have been the result of "some misunderstanding or mistake".

I am afraid not. In the Soviet Union that sort of behaviour is not the result of a mistake. It was a deliberate policy decision.

Why was it made? Probably because it was part of Russia's grudging attitude towards anything and everything that her allies accomplished in the war. Very few Soviet citizens outside of Murmansk itself have ever heard of the Murmansk run. Why should they? The USSR won the war by its own unaided efforts. Every Russian child knows that. If you start letting on about this Murmansk run it might lead to the uncomfortable realisation that the Western Allies did, after all, play a part in the victory, and that wouldn't do.

So if the Murmansk run never happened, clearly there can be no Allied war cemetery in Murmansk. Or if there has to be, then ignore it. Treat the mourners as interlopers and trespassers. Show them unmistakably what you think of them. Try to ensure that they and their friends will never come back. Then maybe the Murmansk run, and the tiresome 3,000 men who died on it, will be forgotten.

The dedication took place on June 5th. On June 11th an article appeared in *News, A Soviet View of World Events*, an official magazine published in English (and many other languages) in Moscow.

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The article was by Mikola Bazhan, a deputy in the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, who in 1947 apparently visited Britain at the invitation of Parliament.

His piece (for export only, of course) was entitled "For Anglo-Soviet Friendship", and it contained the following passage: "[In London] we spoke of the convoys that Britain's brave seamen had brought amid such hazards to Murmansk. . . . Today I ask: 'Have you forgotten them'?"

## CHAPTER VI

# Brain-Washing in Practice

MNYP-MNYPY! (Pronounce it Meere-Meerov). Everywhere in the Soviet Union you see the slogan—"Peace throughout the World!"

Peace, peace, peace. The theme is hammered at with the cumulative force of endless repetition. There are huge hoardings and little handbills, banners and flags carrying the words. The slogan is hung from the façades of public buildings, draped against a poppy-red background on railway bridges. Children sing of it at school. It appears in such unlooked-for places as over the screen of a little cinema in northern Kazakhstan.

The Soviet Union longs for peace, is working for peace. The Soviet Union will bring peace to all the world—if only she is not frustrated by the machinations of the hydrogen-bomb lunatics in the West.

Newspaper editorials repeat the theme almost daily. Official magazines take it up earnestly. "Now that you have seen our country, Gospodeen MacColl, can you doubt that we are sincere when we say that we stand for peace?"

Gospodeen MacColl could much more easily accept the sincerity of all this were it not that alongside the Mnyp-Mnyp campaign there is another, also in full swing, and not at all calculated to result in peaceful intentions.

You don't see any sign of this parallel campaign in Moscow or Leningrad, where foreigners are fairly plentiful. But get away from from the big cities, out into the remoter parts of the vast country and you find it everywhere.

It is a vicious propaganda campaign against the West, conducted by the authorities. And the local Soviets would not go about this sort of systematic affair without directives from Moscow.



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In the centre of nearly every small town in the USSR, sometimes in the Park of Culture and Rest, sometimes in a central square or main street, you will find a row of hoardings. On these are displayed a selection of cartoons in the proportion of about six anti-American to one anti-British. There is also a sprinkling of anti-Franco, anti-Pope and anti-French.

They cannot by any stretch of the imagination be described as gentle fun. They are crude (and effective) and animated by hatred and scorn. They are meant to incite and to stir up loathing and I would say that they succeed.

I saw groups of townspeople in the various republics standing laughing appreciatively at the cartoons, which are regularly changed. A senile, snivelling John Bull; a reptilian Uncle Sam; a cowardly, frightened France were the main characters of this campaign by which the rulers of Russia are helping to ease world tension.

Down in the heart of the republic of Uzbekstan, or way out in some little whistle-stop town on the Trans-Siberian railway, the people are almost totally ignorant of the world outside the Soviet borders. It is a shadowy, unreal thing to them. Who are the British and Americans and French? What do they stand for? What do they want?

Regularly, systematically their minds are being inflamed against the West by this propaganda. Week after week the Western nations are depicted as villainous, treacherous and conspiratorial.

I went out to a kolkholz—collective farm—miles outside Alma Ata, not far from the Chinese frontier, in the depths of Asiatic Russia. It was a land of compelling beauty, huge mountains with the snow on them, great orchards in blossom. We came to the entrance to the farm—isolated, miles from anywhere. And there, on either side of the gate, stood two big posters. One showed a moronic G.I. carrying a germ warfare appliance, and shrinking beneath the denunciation of an apple-cheeked Soviet mother; the other a leering Uncle Sam with a Japanese soldier in his hip pocket, poring over the blueprints of a new H-bomb.

Try to imagine a farm in, say, the heart of Wales. And as you drive up to its entrance you suddenly encounter two violently

anti-Soviet posters, rearing up without explanation from the green fields.

Dulles is a special target in these pictures. He is shown as a repellent figure, often in circumstances of crude vulgarity and coarseness. John Bull is usually depicted as a sly schemer, always trying to get others (often France) to do his dirty work for him.

It is rare that one encounters the light touch, or the sort of restrained cartooning to which we are accustomed in the west. The only example I found of a note of good humour in this connection was when during a circus performance, a man came out and placed a huge microphone on a table. Then a dog came rushing in, put its paws on the table, barked three times into the mike and rushed off again. "And that," said the man by way of explanation, "was the Voice of America signing off."

But good humour was rare. Ill-feeling and malice were plentiful. And so until I hear that the authorities have called off their hate campaign among the backwoods I shall continue to take MNYP-MNYPY! with plenty of salt.

## Close on the Heels of Malenkov

THE only story of mine that the Soviet censors completely killed was the account of the agricultural crisis deep in the heart of the new Russia.

It is a crisis which, unless it is resolved, may have repercussions up in the Kremlin. For the Soviet Union's dynamic No. 2 man, Nikita Khrushchev is personally involved.

Khrushchev has been crowding Malenkov, titular heir to Stalin, increasingly in the past six months. Not long after Malenkov succeeded Stalin he surrendered one of the key positions of power in the Soviet Union—the post of first secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR. Khrushchev it was who took it over.

Khrushchev is a handsome fellow, with a livelier expression than most top Soviet men. He has prematurely white hair, like an American big businessman. And he was not afraid of reopening a friendship a few months back with a prominent US lawyer, who was in the Ukraine in 1946 working for the United Nations famine relief organisation, and who, visiting Moscow at the end of 1953, was made welcome in the Kremlin as an old acquaintance.

At the last big May Day parade in Red Square it was noticed that Malenkov stood down after the first hour or so—and Khrushchev took the spotlight. Khrushchev it was who indefatigably waved and smiled and raised his hat atop the Lenin-Stalin tomb as the crowding ranks of the faithful surged past in the afternoon sunshine.

But Khrushchev went out on a limb when he allowed himself to become identified with the massive "Virgin Lands" project to increase the Soviet Union's agricultural yield. This agricultural question has been one of the nagging Soviet problems ever since the Revolution.

Stalin tried to solve it by brutality. The recalcitrant small farmers were callously done away with in one of the great massacres of the twentieth century (Winston Churchill could not resist questioning Stalin about it during one of his war-time visits).

The Stalin massacres solved nothing. Today, as Soviet farming experts will admit—if they are sure that no one is listening in—there are less cattle in Russia than there were in Tsarist days. The usual alibi is “faulty distribution”. This is the excuse for all the farming shortages which now plague Russia. But while I am prepared to agree that distribution is poor—I don’t think that there is all that much to distribute.

After Stalin died it was possible for all hands to relax a little. Public admission of farming mistakes was possible, and Khrushchev, playing the new-broom role to the hilt, announced a vast new economic plan in September 1953. “Crude errors by the various local planning authorities” were frowned at—but glittering promises were held out. Within three short years, said Khrushchev, there would come an “era of plenty”.

The drums of propaganda were banged for all they were worth. “Selfish citizens” who preferred the “easy life of the big city” to the “challenge of the farm” were prodded into volunteering for the Virgin Lands. It was announced that well over one million had volunteered, and about 600,000 are already grappling in the mud and dust of the sixteen raw new farming regions in Asiatic Kazakhstan, West Siberia, the Urals and across the Volga.

But from the start things went askew. The whole scheme was rushed. Not enough planning ahead. Deficient organisation. Poor staff work. A failure to provide basically decent living conditions for the human task force.

How do I know? Because the Soviet newspapers, led by *Pravda* itself, went into detail about this large-scale failure. And the newspapers published letters from indignant workers on the farms, describing the misery, the chaos, and the wastage.

And did I try to see for myself? I was only a few hundred miles away from some of the biggest of the Kazakhstan projects during my Asiatic trip. But when I put in for a visit it was explained that recent heavy rains had made it impossible for any car to negotiate the roads.

Here is the article which I wrote and which was entirely killed by the censors: Moscow, June 13—"Following sharp criticism by *Pravda* of the farmers working on the huge 'New Lands' project over in Kazakhstan and Siberia for their slow progress, the agricultural crisis was dramatically underlined by a personal visit just paid to the area by none other than Nikita S. Khrushchev (pronounce it Krooshchoff) the able and dynamic First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR, and Malenkov's trusty No 2. It so happened that on my recent trip to Soviet Central Asia I followed to some extent in Khrushchev's footsteps. And the staff of the collective farm that I visited outside Alma Ata was still agog when I arrived there, because Khrushchev had been there only ten days before. The chair he had sat in was reverently pointed out to me and the manager assured me that on behalf of his twelve hundred workers he had given 'Comrade Khrushchev the word of honour of a collective farmer' that in future his men would attain even better standards of output.

"But it is far to the north of Alma Ata that the present troubles are most acute. As my plane buzzed on northwards across the great plains of Kazakhstan I saw down below huge patterns of newly turned earth, at first a rich nigger brown something like peat bogs in appearance, and later, as the land grew more fertile, a light green. There were squares and oblongs and triangles on a vast scale—all of them the outlines of 'pilot' or trial jobs. And then later as we drew near to Aksmolensk and Petropavlovsk—which is one of the receiving centres for the hundreds of thousands of labourers coming in from all over the Soviet Union to help work the Virgin Lands—we saw the great raw farms themselves, like some blueprint of man against nature.

"But nature has been rather uncooperative up till now. There was a very late spring—in some places nearly a whole month late.

"And then came torrential rains which bedevilled working conditions and left the pioneers struggling in a nasty situation. The Moscow authorities duly took note of this—but they are not content to let it go at that. The matter is too vital. The farmers, they said, must henceforth work even harder and with

greater dedication to make up for the late spring. This is the constantly reiterated theme.

"There are two disconcerting facts about the present situation, and here in Moscow the authorities make no bones about them: (1) the number of cattle presently on the hoof inside Russia is less than the number in 'the old days', (2) in some regions of Western Siberia the grain sowings are heavily down on last year. There are other minor setbacks, such as the fact that the potato crop in the Moscow region is less than last year's.

"But these facts pale beside the typical statistic that near Omsk only 25,000 hectares have been sown to grain so far this year, compared with 320,000 hectares last year. Machines and men have been poured into the Virgin Lands with that single-minded devotion which the Soviet Union brings to all its enterprises. And yet somehow the thing isn't working out quite as advertised. Tractors by the tens of thousands, workers by the score of thousands. And a press campaign to prod engineers and other technicians into giving up their cushy jobs and joining the near million farm labourers in the great trek.

"Has there been muddle? Has there been over-hasty planning in the desire to establish a huge new granary for this nation? Do the living conditions of the workers leave something to be desired? And what of the all-important tractor stations, strung out across this potentially vital new farming region? How are they functioning? Pravda and other official organs lay the blame squarely at the door of some of the organisers of the Machine Centres for the failure to fulfill the required 'norms', or live up to the overall plans. It's a tremendous proposition, of course, and for that reason it isn't easy to bring off. Distance, remoteness, communications, the supply problem the housing difficulty—and on top of all that the bad weather. It's no jog-trot.

"But the USSR needs the grain, the cattle, the milk, and the vegetables, and she means to get them. Hence Comrade Khrushchev's recent urgent visit. And hence the pledging of 'the word of honour of a collective farmer'."

Khrushchev was up against it. The fact of his swing through Kazakhstan showed how seriously the government took the

situation, for Soviet big-shots very rarely do any travelling inside the USSR or relish leaving their Kremlin offices, even briefly. It was, in reality, a double crisis: not only was the Virgin Lands project hanging fire; in order to try to ensure its success Khrushchev ordered a big concentration of men and machines at the "front line"—and this concentration drained the resources of the older established farming areas, and so weakened them as well.

*Pravda* itself (May 11th) listed 50,000 tractor drivers and mechanics, 14,000 tractors and thousands of other items of equipment that had been sent to the Virgin Lands.

But what happened to it all? Part of the answer appeared in a series of indignant letters in *Pravda* and other newspapers. From North Kazakhstan a man wrote to complain that the farm machinery was to be seen, rusting and rotting in great piles near the railheads. Broken spares were sinking into the mud or carelessly flung away. Machines which needed proper upkeep were left to deteriorate in a tangle of hay and mud and spilt lubricants.

Another letter-writer in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* (the paper of the Soviet Youth organisations) described how teen-aged girls, newly arrived from the big cities of the west and lacking any sort of farming knowledge were sent straight out into the fields while able-bodied men preferred to hug the stove and the vodka bottle. And a third, in *Izvestia* this time, denounced the manager of a local Machine Tractor Station who, it was declared, had forgotten to provide any ploughs for his "shock brigade".

Thousands of the new workers who had been rushed into this immense gamble (the goal was to harvest at least 20 million tons of grain from the New Lands within only two years) endured wretched living conditions. Many of them lived in tents, and if the road along which I was to have travelled to visit the farms was closed because of the rain, I should think that those tent cantonments too must have been in sad condition.

Nobody had troubled to remember the thousands of little practical details of everyday living. *Izvestia* reported how a 500 miles journey to the nearest big town was necessary to get things

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like toothbrushes and toothpaste, thread, shoelaces and envelopes. There were not enough lamps or wash basins or cooking vessels. Discontent spread and morale sagged because of the fumbling leadership and evidence of waste.

Malenkov, who from the start has clearly disassociated himself from the Khrushchchev Virgin Lands plan, must be watching with particular interest the efforts of his successor as head of the Communist Party of the USSR, to extricate his reputation from the mud down on the farm.



## What's on the Menu

FAULTY distribution. It's a complaint you hear so much about in Soviet Russia. It's a complaint that the Supreme Soviet publicly took note of at its meetings last spring.

Distribution—bound up with communications—is a terrifying problem. When I was out in Central Asia, flying over one howling wilderness after another, contemplating the enormous distances of this vast land (far bigger than the United States with Alaska) I marvelled that the Tsarist armies of the first world war (referred to by the Soviets as “The First Imperialist War” as opposed to the “Great Patriotic War” of 1910-13) had ever contrived mobilisation, or had been maintained in the field successfully for as long as they were.

Even today, after nearly four decades of Communist rule, the USSR is on very short measure where modern communications are concerned. The trains crawl and stop constantly on their journeys. It took eighteen hours for the Bilisi-Baku express, complete with International Coach, to cover 345 miles. That works out at a little over 19 miles an hour. I wish that I had counted the number of times we stopped between stations—I estimate that it was between forty and fifty.

A stout effort is made to keep internal air communications going briskly with a muster of rather battered Convair-type planes. But a country so big could obviously use an air fleet many times as big, served by proper airfields instead of the makeshift landing places, and with big modern liners.

The impact of “poor distribution” is most easily seen in the food supply. Western visitors staying in one of the Intourist hotels of Moscow are right up among the most favoured of the VIPs. These Intourist hotels in the capital are supposed to be the shop window.

But what happens in the shop window? You sit down at your restaurant table and a moderately affable waiter or waitress hands you the Intourist "international" combined menu and wine list. Ah, you think, this looks rather promising. It is a twenty-page affair, well printed on good glazed paper.

It is split up into sections—"Hor d'œuvres", "Soups", "Fish", "Entrées", etc., and since it is intended for the foreigner the menu is printed in English, French and German as well as Russian.

All right, we are hungry—so let's analyse this menu. There are 155 listed dishes, including desserts. But you quickly get to accept a discouraging fact: the only dishes which are supposedly available are those which have the price pencilled in opposite the printed entry.

And of the fairly imposing list of 155 items, only 86 have a pencilled figure opposite them. Take the first page: the list consists of the following—fresh caviar, pressed caviar, red Amur caviar, freshly salted salmon, salmon with lemon, Balyk of white fish, Tyoshka fillet of white fish, Shemaya herring smoked, cured Sevriuga fish, sardines with lemon, sturgeon with horseradish, sturgeon in mayonnaise, Beluga fish with horseradish, Kiki sprats with hardboiled egg, Soodak fish in mayonnaise, marinade of Soodak fish, herring fillets garnished.

Of those seventeen items, just five are available—the fresh caviar, the red caviar, salmon with lemon, Kiki sprats with hardboiled egg, and the garnished fillet of herring.

In the three months that I was there, such tantalising entries as cold sucking pig with horseradish sauce, kidneys in sour cream, and Caucasian sashlyk (those bits of meat cooked and served on a spit) remained just come-ons.

Next section on the menu—tarts, and cakes. A much better showing—nine out of ten. But alas, we now come on a blight. Of the nine kinds of fruit next listed, not a single one is apparently to be had. (Fresh fruit is one of the big problems.)

Now the wine list. There are twelve respectable Soviet wines listed, the majority from Georgia which produces the best in Russia. But of the twelve, only five are actually in the cellars. And of the fortified wines—Soviet-style port, madeira, etc.—

a mere eight out of thirty-one listed. Champagne is better (Soviet champagne, of course), four out of five. (Champagne seems to be something that might almost be in over-production. I never found it lacking anywhere on my travels however difficult the situation in other respects, and there is a champagne sales drive. For instance, you are apt to walk into a restaurant at breakfast time and find every table bearing a bottle of champagne in a gleaming—but iceless—bucket.)

Brandies—six out of nine listed. (I enjoyed the Armenian cognacs. Unlike nearly every other imitation of the French original which I have wincingly tried throughout the world, this one did not leaving a searing trail of agony as it found its own level within you, but was mild.) Other liqueurs—three out of ten listed. Vodkas, two out of two. Other schnapps, two out of five.

Beers three out of six. Mineral waters two out of two. Soft drinks one out of ten, and tea and coffee 100 per cent present.

But even on this basis things are not what they seem. For on any given day you are apt to find that not even the pencilled-in items are all available. Of the eighty-six main dishes there may be fifteen or so, and those the most tempting, which are not so much “off” as never on.

What about prices? I’ve told you about the depressing exchange rate, and since that is fixed by the Soviet authorities I have no option but to translate for you at that rate.

Here are some examples from this Intourist menu: Caviar (a pretty generous portion, and very good quality) R10.50, or about 18s. Kiki sprats with hardboiled egg (they reminded me of poor man’s anchovies) R4.05, about 6s. Salad of (tinned) crab R7.95, say 14s. Cold turkey, garnished, R8.05, say 11s. 8d. Eggs provençale R5.25, or 10s. 6d. Beef tea with rusks R3.80, say 7s. 6d. Beef tea with egg R4.50, or 8s. 4d. Vol-au-vent of Soodak fish R11.60, just about £1. Soodak fish pan-fried with potatoes R10.25, just under £1 (and if you got potatoes it was a big day because they were scarce).

Beef Stroganoff R9.25, or 16s. 3d. Breaded mutton chops R6.90, or 12s. Ham in madeira sauce R11.05, nearly £1. Roast pork with garnishing R8.30, or 13s. 8d. Green peas braised in butter R4.55, say nearly 8s. (and if there were any

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fresh peas going that was another big surprise). Ham omelette R7.55, or 8s. Pancakes stuffed with jelly R2.20, or 4s. 3d. "Gruel of rice" R2.40, say 4s. 4d. Compote of (preserved) fruit R3.35, or about 7s. Coffee with cream R2.40 or 4s. 4d. a pot.

Georgian red wine No. 2—R36 a bottle, over 3 guineas. Georgian white wine No. 1—R30 a bottle, nearly £3. Moscow brand vodka—R5.20 per 100 grams (a small carafe full), say 9s.

After a couple of weeks or so the diet becomes monotonous. You find that it is almost impossible to get foods to suit the season. I only once had a good green salad all the time I was in Soviet Russia—and that was the day I lunched at the home of a French diplomat. When the heat wave seizes Moscow in its grip you seek in vain for appropriate foods. Sometimes there may be cucumbers, with a sour cream sauce. Occasionally tomatoes. Never, it seems, lettuce.

"Ah, it is the distribution, gospodeen." Moscow is badly off as regards a greenhouse industry. In mid-April, when I first arrived there were almost no fresh vegetables except carrots to be obtained at any price. And in the streets fresh flowers were rare and very dear. You would catch sight of a patch of colour at a street-side flower stall and make for it excitedly, realising how much you had been missing flowers—how starved you were for a little colour in this drab, yellowy city.

And then when you got up close you found that they were artificial flowers.

The hunger of the people for something green finds expression in a forest of potted plants and shrubs and flowers in their windows. Wherever you go, you find the windows full of the Soviet equivalent of the aspidistra. From the pavement you glance into a room so overcrowded that it resembles a junk store off the wrong part of Tottenham Court Road. You can see various pieces of furniture, a great bed, an even bigger stove, a table, some scruffy accoutrements, perhaps a radio. But masking it all, forming a sort of chlorophyll filter between the world and this cluttered interior, there is nearly always the plant. Sometimes the size of the plant is in inverse ratio to the

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room it protects. Standing guard on the windowsill in front of one of the saddest interiors upon which I have ever glanced, I once saw a complete rhododendron plant about to bud. You could see why they wanted it there.

But getting back to the food, let me repeat that the sort of menu I have detailed—meretricious and inadequate as it was—is a super luxury affair far beyond the reach of most of the two hundred million citizens of the Soviet Union. For the vast majority of people living under the Hammer and Sickle, the year-in year-out diet consists of cabbage soup, covered by a thick scum of grease. In it floats a chunk of white fat and perhaps half a sausage. Apart from that potatoes—when they are obtainable—fish, sunflower oil and plenty of weak, sweet tea.

## CHAPTER IX

# It Depends How You Measure It

ALL the time that I was in the Soviet Union I kept doggedly reminding myself that I must always impartially keep going two different sets of standards simultaneously.

The first was my automatic tendency to compare all I saw with what I was used to—and indeed took as a matter of course—in the civilisations of the West.

By this yardstick there was little to get enthusiastic over in the USSR.

But the other standard was this: for the peoples of the Soviet Union, were not their living conditions so improved by comparison with their lot before the bolshevik revolution of 1915 that Russia 1917 might well seem to them to be a paradise of the proletariat?

This second part of the problem was hard to be sure about. It seemed difficult to believe that life in Russia today, with all its inadequacies, shortcomings, dreariness and occasional squalor, could really be much better than it was forty years ago.

The only way of trying to make sure would have been to ask as many Soviet citizens as possible what they really thought about things. But one circumstance which the authorities really take trouble to prevent is any chance of that.

A barrier is pushed up between the western visitor and the people of the country. It is especially noticeable in eating places. This sort of thing happened time and again. I would be sitting in a restaurant all alone at a table for four. The place would fill up and presently a single man, or perhaps a couple, would walk up and ask if it was all right to sit down. I would always smile and say *Posholista* (a safe word at all times) and down they would sit.

And then it was always the same. The waiter or the maître d'hôtel would rush up and heatedly, peremptorily order them off. He would gesture towards me and mutter something, and usually my fellow diners would get up and go away without any argument.

Sometimes they would remonstrate. This was especially the case during Easter week, when all Moscow restaurants were jammed and everyone however non-religious was trying to celebrate with a big meal and lots to drink. It seemed absurd to see one man monopolising a table for four and I felt self-conscious about it. People kept trooping over to my table, being told by me that yes, of course they could sit down—and then being immediately chased away.

Several of them gave the waiter an argument—an argument in which I took pleasure in joining, urging them to sit down again, and scowling at the waiter and indicating that I thought he was being over-zealous. But it never did any good.

I finally complained to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and asked what sort of nonsense was going on. Upon which I received the classic Soviet remark when a tricky question is put up and there is nothing that can be said in refutation: "This that you say is very strange."

I wanted to be fair and to like things. If I could—and then, unless I watched my step, I found that I was drifting into the habit of judging what I saw by completely distorted standards. I would find myself congratulating someone on a building perhaps, or saying that I had enjoyed some visit of inspection when, anywhere else, it would have seemed preposterous.

I was making allowances, saying to myself, "But this is the Soviet Union and so here things are different. You mustn't be too hard on them." To borrow a favourite Soviet phrase—"And why not?" Yes, why not? The bolsheviks have been running the country for quite a long time—soon half a century. Must they be given the benefit of the doubt much longer? Can they not now stand the hard scrutiny which would be given to anyone else?

When you are in France, or Italy or Spain or Holland or Belgium or Scandinavia, you don't go around saying to yourself, "Heavens! That man actually smiled." In the countries

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of the West, you accept polite behaviour as the normal thing. But the Soviets have built up surliness and bad temper, black looks and boorishness to such a pitch that when Marshal Zhukov thinks that he will throw a few crumbs of praise in the direction of Montgomery and Eisenhower, as he belatedly did in a speech last June, the starry-eyed of the west get all excited and see in it something significant.

It is a new form of tactics—to behave so badly nine-tenths of the time that when you switch back to the behaviour which is accepted as merely normal in the non-Communist world you are heaped with praise. It's a great idea.



## CHAPTER X

# A Date at the Art Gallery

To give you a notion of what a Soviet art gallery is like, we will now be conducted around a couple of typical examples. The first is in Kharkov, second city of the Ukraine, but it might just as well be in any one of the sixteen Soviet Socialist Republics.

It's a Sunday and quite a number of citizens are drifting through the place, most of the men wearing either Ukrainian blouses, white silk with coloured embroidery down the front, or white tussore suits.

As I told you earlier, it is essential that every picture should conform to progressive socialist principles, meaning that it should either be so naturalistic a landscape that you can pretty well pluck that loose piece of bark off the birch tree, or else that it tells some significant story, easily discernible by the lowest mental common denominator among the visitors.

First we are confronted by a classic oil painting: "The Last Hours of Pompeii". The place is crashing in ruins before our eyes and the effete nobles are running futilely from their crumbling palaces trying to save their money, their treasures and, as an afterthought, their wives. To no purpose. We have already seen this picture reproduced many times throughout the Soviet Union and the moral is there for all to see. As the guide remarks, afraid that we may have missed the point, "In France and in various other countries, they know only too well what this means." See? For Pompeii, read the Third Republic. As we stroll on through the galleries we ponder the fact that not so long ago, British popular taste too, enjoyed a picture that told a story. Remember "A Fallen Idol". Remember "A Hopeless Dawn". But come to think of it, that was about sixty years ago. Not for the first time does it occur to us that the

Soviet revolutionary drive is petering out in the sort of thing that is curiously bourgeois and old-fashioned.

The guide nudges us and says, "The expression is everything—see the little lad here." The lad in question is sitting at a desk. His clothes are in poor repair, but as he gazes upwards his face has a notably rapt air. Continues the guide: "One sees instantly on examining his face that he yearns to study. He is poor. His clothes are ragged, but his underlying sense of sympathy and intelligence have most brilliantly been brought out by the artist." Next we see a beautiful young woman lying dead on the floor of a house which has been largely demolished by gunfire. Through the jagged hole in the wall of her bedroom we can discern other bombshells bursting in air. Says the guide with a sidelong glance of reproof at us, "This is the bad aggressors' war in the Crimea, the one which took place in 1854. Here is an innocent victim of the aggressors."

Next we come to a big painting of nineteenth-century aristocrats feeding a crowded yardful of borzois, while a group of peasants looks on dejectedly. "It clearly shows that in those sad days the dogs lived far better than the serfs." (Serfdom in Russia was abolished under the Tsardom in 1861, forty-six years before the bolshevik revolution. The communists today like to give the impression that it was one of their own achievements.) And now a painting from the crucible of the revolution in 1917. A banker type, who too late rues the day, sits in desperation in his drawing-room. His greatcoat is fur-lined. He wears spats, and beneath the table is his gladstone bag, overflowing with negotiable bonds with which he had purposed to flee. But for him the jig is up. A Red Guard watches closely, bayonet fixed and cigarette scornfully aglow.

Now this is interesting: a big oil-painting of a young Jewess being execrated by her fellows in some remote Ukrainian village during Tsarist days. Why? "Because she is having the temerity to fall in love with a Russian man." Who incites the mob? "The ignorant rabbi—see him there—inflaming all." And who hang back? "Ah, the younger generation, who fail to see wrong in this innocent sentimentality. Religion here meets its match."

Now we come to what is perhaps the most striking work in

the whole collection. It depicts none other than Vishinsky, white-maned and benevolent, pulverising the forces of evil with a brilliant speech in the general assembly of the United Nations in New York. Vishinsky is reaching his peroration. On his right the peaceloving delegations are giving him a big hand, the Czechs in the first row—but right behind them the Ukrainians. On Vishinsky's left are the disarrayed warmongers of the West, who half rise in their seats, fairly spitting their venom. A big businessman, paunchy and suspect, is just getting handed to him by a sneering Czech a transcript of Vishinsky's remarks. He doesn't at all want to accept it. On the desk behind Vishinsky—familiar touch—stands the sort of lamp that one encounters everywhere in the Soviet Union (it is the one that is at Stalin's right hand in the famous picture of him working late in the Kremlin). How can it have made its way into UNO HQ in New York? Never mind. And up in the public gallery Vishinsky has roused the New York public to a frenzy of enthusiasm, led by a typical New Yorker in a bright-red party blouse.

Now here is a poignant vignette—a young Komsomol chap has failed to come up to the expected standards of his comrades committee. He has been roundly taken to task, and now sits in deep dejection all alone—as he imagines—to grapple with his problems. A dim outlook. But stay—behind him are his comrades who have come tiptoeing back into the committee room to aid him. One of them indeed wants to go instanter to help the erring fellow with his homework, but is being laughingly restrained by the senior member of the form, who clearly thinks that a few more moments of letting the prodigal stew in his own juice can do nothing but good.

Hullo—what's this? Why, it's the laboratory of the famed Professor Pavlov, the renowned scientist who established the law of the conditioned reflex largely by means of tests on dogs (when Pavlov rang the dinner-bell the dogs would drool). Here then is the triumphant scene in Pavlov's lab., and the professor is depicted holding in his hands the notes which are destined to establish his place in scientific history. Several young nurses who have helped him look on happily, and sitting there on the bench amid the test-tubes is drooling old Fido

himself, all agog. He stares up trustingly into the eyes of his master as one who says "I played my part, didn't I?"

Ah—a familiar figure here. None other than our own Dr. Hewlett Johnson, the Red Dean of Canterbury. It is hard to describe accurately the emotions which afflict us as we recognise this great Englishman in a place so far away from his diocese. Canterbury to Kharkov—quite a jump. He plays his part at the climax of the Stockholm Peace Pledge ceremony. Fingering his cross, he bends forward the better to catch the words of a Mongolian woman speaker. On her other side is Professor Joliot-Curie, who about that time was denied his place on the French Atomic Energy Commission because of his Communist enthusiasm. But, as our guide reminds us, while the misguided French have sacked Curie, we in Britain have had the decency to retain Johnson in his post. Most progressive of us.

As I have repeatedly been assured in the USSR, he, the Dean, is regarded as the greatest living Englishman—"your real contribution to the world of today". Indeed he is hailed as Britain's counterpart to Charles Chaplin and Paul Robeson, and you can't say fairer than that.

I always tell my Soviet friends, when Johnson's name is mentioned, that I regard him as at least the equal of that other great English thinker of recent times, the late Professor W. Heath Robinson, an assurance which invariably seems to be appreciated.

Now to show that Kharkov doesn't have it all its own way, let us switch over to Tashkent, in distant Uzbekistan, where we are going the rounds of the art gallery with a guide whose command of English is outmatched by his enthusiasm.

Preliminary spiel: "Before the revolution there was no Uzbek painting and no Uzbek artists. Now there is being many. Uzbek painting is nationalist in inspiration and socialist in character. Come please.

"Aha, the scene in the vineyard. It shows the friendship between the Russian girl and the Uzbek girl. It is symbolic of union of all the peoples of the USSR." "Here a picture of the glorious Red Army overthrowing the Japanese in Manchuria. See how the liberation is hailed by the happy peoples. And—what a pleasant detailing—the little Manchurian boy is running

out to guide the humane Red officers along the correct track. That little man will recall and will undoubtedly recount with pride and emotion his experiences of this always glorious day.'

Of a work by another, and even more than usually naturalistic artist: "He shows the beauties of nature with an insightfulness and technicality which are rare. And he is realising and fully showing that the beauties of nature are intended in the first place for the people."

MacColl: Who are they intended for in the second place?

Guide: It is not being shown.

"And now we are seeing here the symbolism of these little boys picking flowers between an observatory, which had been newly erected by the Uzbek peoples, and a fine new collective farm in the distance.

"Now, here is a clever picture, a group of Uzbek girls in their native costume are visiting Moscow, and are seeing their first performance of ballet—Swan Lake. See—here the first one—and one can tell rapidly that she is herself a dancer, thank you to the experting of the artist with his extricate detail—shows shyness and shrinks a little, half shielding her face with her hand, because to her maidensome manner of thought, these Moscow dancers appear half naked. Next to her another girl—also obviously a dancer herself—leaps up from her seat in admirational ecstasy. She is so happy and she wishes at once to beat time to the music and communicate with her body a chaste rhapsody to the events upon the stage. Near her a third girl is going half into a dream with delight. It is not being something that they are knowing until now. And finally a fourth girl, a musician it do seem, does admire the always genial music of the Swan Lake.

"Now we see a foreman of a shoe factory, he does speak to the morning shift and he is telling of improvements possible in the technicalities and the endeavours. The rest of the brigade does listen with deep respect to the kindly and humane man. One can see how they do calculate the time saving possible as a result of the novel scheme."

I turn away—but too hastily, it appears. "But see, the symbolism! There are very large open windows, and through them does shine the sun from without. This means, well, that

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the enthusiasm is capable and openly greeted, because of the help that the government is giving. The sunshine into the broad windows is symbolic of the attention given by the government to the skill of these shoemakers."

A study of a fifteen-year-old girl gravely assaying some cotton plants. "All the doors of the future ways are open before our Uzbek children." A group of Uzbek girls laughing excitedly and playing the tambourine because one of them has just won a special commendation for rapid cotton-picking. "See the bright colours and the sunshine are special symbolic of optimism and of gladness." Stalin and Mao walking along together in the grounds of the Kremlin. "Well, the two leaders are just walking along, shoulder to shoulder, and thus they do symbolize the unity of these two great democratic and peace-loving nations."

## CHAPTER XI

# Airborne

IF A committee of experts had sat down to plan the maximum contrast between West and East at the earliest possible moment of the visit, they couldn't have done it more brilliantly than by what happens at Helsinki airport.

I'd sat in the cheerful, scrupulously clean airport restaurant, eating weiner schnitzel and drinking beer. Now it was plane time for Moscow. I walk across to the rather seedy-looking Convair-type Soviet plane, painted dark green and with the red flag on its side.

The interior of the little aircraft has two rows of seats down its left-hand side and a single row down the other. The seats have what looks like pieces of ancient carpet over them. There are no seat belts. A piece of that bright-blue plush with which I was to become so familiar had been festooned round the entrance to the cockpit to resemble a curtain. It hung lopsidedly.

I still had in my mind the mental picture of the up-to-date Scandinavian plane in which I'd come from Stockholm, with its lavish comfort, solicitous service, and tall, immaculately groomed stewardesses.

The Soviet stewardess was a short, extremely dowdy girl, anaemic and with a reluctant smile. Her hair-do was fussy and amateurish looking. (When we reached Moscow she fished a shabby overcoat and unbecoming red hat out of somewhere and was all set to go home.) My fellow passengers were a self-important-looking Russian, with an official air, who took the place of honour in all Russian planes (the first seat up in front on the left, by the cockpit) and two United States diplomatic couriers, who, although they seemed to be on excellent terms with each other, sat as far apart as possible, one right at the back, the other up front.

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About half of the ventilation blow-holes above the seats were working. The rest were jammed. Nobody cared whether the passengers smoked at take-off or not. The Soviet pilot was a short, greying man, with an earnest expression, his trousers cut in the prevailing bell-bottomed style. He paid no attention to anyone as he walked down the aisle.

We took off fast and buzzed along at a good clip at what I estimated to be about 8,000 or 9,000 feet. Later in the flight, after we had left Leningrad, the stewardess came round with box lunches. This is a new refinement, and as far as I know the "show window" Helsinki-Moscow flight on which many foreigners travel, is the only one inside the USSR which provides a free meal of this kind. I certainly never saw another in the 6,000 or more miles I travelled by air within the country, and whenever I asked if there would be a meal aloft they looked at me in amazement.

The meal they gave me on the Moscow run (and I had exactly the same when I emerged three months later) consisted of a caviar sandwich and a garlic sausage sandwich, both cellophane wrapped and both in brown bread (or black bread, as it is called in Russia) two apples, some biscuits and some good boiled sweets. And there was as much tea as you could drink, served weak and sweet, no milk, but a slice of lemon. The tea came in glasses with ornamented metal bases, which I later found were standard in restaurants all over the country.

The stewardess also handed me a couple of dog's-eared Soviet magazines. Soviet Russia looks upon the West as far too frivolous. Certainly by our standards these Russian magazines—and I was to go glumly through many another—were unbelievably dull. Photographs of men reading scientific papers to their colleagues, of officials addressing school classes, of workers being shown some new technical process at the bench, of the whitecoated professor hard at it with test-tube and bunsen burner in his laboratory, or of moppets being taught how to play the clarinet.

Shawled women smilingly buying new pairs of gum boots in a village store; a dormitory in a children's sanatorium, laughing young workers about to set off ski-ing—that sort of thing.



The nearest approach to entertainment value I ever spotted in one of these magazines was a selection of photos of all-in wrestling in the USA. However, the article accompanying the pictures did not explain that this activity is looked on as a piece of uproarious make-believe in America, but presented it to Soviet readers in horror at "the extreme brutality" and "degradation" of the Anglo-Saxons.

The weather was cloudy, but now and again I could see the innumerable lakes that twinkled among the woods of the border zone. Because we were flying fairly low there was an impression of high speed. I took a rather good view of Soviet internal aviation. Perhaps I was lucky, but I never once got caught in a delay, let alone a flight cancellation. All the flights I was on took off and arrived dead on time. And it happens that I actively dislike the chattiness over the public address system which seems to be an inescapable "amenity" of modern flying in the west. I am never curious about flight details—the timely arrival is my only concern.

Obviously the Soviets could do with a modern fleet of big airliners, but if they have to go on making the best of these obsolete small types I think they make a good job of it.

Leningrad provided the first pleasant surprise of the trip. I had heard many stories before leaving London of the thoroughness with which the customs officials took their jobs. But that is one of the many things which has been modified since Stalin's death. There strode to the spindly little ramp which was pushed up against our plane a very polite man in uniform who saluted the meagre plane load with a flourish before collecting our passports. Then we got out and were driven by bus a couple of hundred yards to the customs house. The examination was carried out by a woman. She had pronouncedly slav features, with high cheek-bones and a pale skin. Her finger-nails were carmine-tinted, her blonde hair was carefully waved, she wore kaprons (the Russian nylons) and high-heeled shoes beneath her smart black and gold uniform.

She too could not have been more polite. I was not asked to open either of my two large valises. She merely asked with a smile: "No fruits? No newspapers? No books? No printed

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materials?" I said no, which was true. She then noted the numbers of my travellers cheques and remarked with another smile "That is all". I'd say that was one of the least onerous and most polite customs examinations I have had anywhere in the world.

There were two little details to which I paid small heed at the time, but of which I came later on to realise the significance. Two men in dark-blue suits stood at the elbow of the customs woman, listening intently to all that passed and craning over her shoulders to watch what she wrote down about my travellers cheques.

And as I stood outside in the watery sunset, waiting for the two US couriers to get their diplomatic pouches cleared, which took nearly an hour, a young man with traces of smallpox ravage on his face, came up to me and asked, "Are you diplomatic, sir?" I said no, and told him who I was. "Ah, then," he volunteered, "I shall telephone ahead to Moscow and ask Intourist to make arrangements for your accommodation."

The point about these two small episodes is this: as I got to know more about the USSR I discovered that nobody is ever allowed to do anything unsupervised especially where foreigners are concerned. Someone is always present to check on someone else. You never see anyone alone. Even the nominal boss of a factory or a farm or a museum seems invariably to have a hard-faced, gold-toothed character ambling along beside him, keeping tabs on all that passes. More often he has a full-scale committee to keep him in countenance. That explained the two men who kept the customs woman so keenly under surveillance. (In the museum of the Kremlin, the various glass cases containing valuable exhibits each have not one but two little lead seals on scarlet thread to indicate that the locks are whole. The man who seals the case has his seal cross-checked by another seal—you can't be too careful.)

And the young man who telephoned to Moscow when he suddenly realised that I was not heading for any Embassy was only being helpful incidentally. His primary purpose was to ensure that I would be met as soon as I got off the plane, and not go wandering around by myself. As you move about in the USSR you are passed from hand to hand like the baton

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in a relay race. Your passport is lifted as soon as you arrive anywhere and is given back to you only when you are about to leave again. Most Intourist representatives were willing to let me have mine back as I set out to drive to the airport, but one or two of them, taking no chances, told me that it would be returned to me only when I was on the plane. Who knows? If MacColl had his passport given to him before he actually got into the plane, he might be tempted to go off on some little side-trip of his own.

Moscow airport, and here sure enough, as I walk down the steps, is a young greeter who might be the twin of the one who telephoned from Leningrad. He takes me to the VIP waiting-room, where three boyish-looking Chinese are bobbing up and down, vying with one another to light the cigarette of the uniformed Russian official who has come to meet them.

A drive of about fifteen miles into Moscow. It's dark now. The road has little traffic, but even so, whenever we encounter another car there is great dimming and brightening of headlights, several times in quick succession. Almost no road signs and very few people about. Once or twice we pass little groups, apparently waiting for buses. These always look more "Russian" than I had expected. The men wear fur hats, and often ear-muffs, striped trousers tucked into high boots, long, low-waisted quilted coats and many have bushy moustaches. The women are either dressed like peasants, with shawls on their heads, or else in dowdily sketchy imitation of "western" dress.

Our progress is a series of delayed jerks. I can't understand why. The car seems to be in good trim, and yet just as we seem to be settling down to a pleasant run in high gear, I am thrust forward from my seat, and the chauffeur fiddles down into neutral.

The explanation was simple. It is necessary to save petrol in the USSR, and so chauffeurs are encouraged to put their engines into neutral at every opportunity. So the thing is to rev up, gain momentum, go into neutral, coast, then slam the gears in again. Just wonderful if you want to get one of the prizes which are awarded to those drivers who save the most petrol in a month—but tough on the passenger.

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At the Metropole the glimpse of my suite that I catch while I deposit my bags causes a lowering of morale. The curtained-off and airless alcove in which I was to sleep, and the bathroom, with grubby, chipped tiles on the floor, rust marks on the heating apparatus and a permanent dark stain in the tub itself were not encouraging. Something of my bleak thoughts must have shown itself in my face, for when I went downstairs again, the blonde "Hotel Administrator", a slender woman who spoke good English cried in rallying tones: "Ah, Mr. MacColl, I think you could do with a good dinner!" I said I probably could, and she made a great show of summoning the headwaiter. He turned out to be a gloomy figure, in a battered old dress suit, and an introspective manner. I found out later that being a waiter or waitress in the Soviet Union, even though they only work on alternate days, is no fun. Restaurants all over the country reminded me of Britain just after the last war, when everyone had money and every restaurant was crowded to the doors. The dining-room of a place like the Metropole nearly always looks as though it were in a state of siege. I could never determine why restaurant service in Russia is hopelessly slow. Understaffing, a lack of deft bus boys and well-trained junior staff, kitchens too far away and too old-fashioned, a faulty system of dishing up for the waiters? Whatever the answer you had to make up your mind, if you meant to eat two main meals a day, to wasting four or five hours of your time sitting around in the restaurant. The best waiters I found were out in the provinces, old white-haired men who could probably recall the days of the Tsars. Restaurant service in the USSR is being increasingly taken over by women. "Young men do not like the idea of being waiters," I was told. "They wish to be engineers."

The Metropole dining-room is a vast place, which resembles a dark mahogany swimming pool. It has a tremendously high ceiling, but being windowless, is hot and stuffy. Chasing up towards the distant ceiling is a series of great metal standards on mahogany bases, and culminating in staring lights. Other lights shine down from the ceiling and from a high platform an orchestra is letting fly at the fullest possible decibel volume. The orchestra is all-male except for the pianist. Her stiff fingers

smash down on the piano keys with the unrelenting ardour of tiny hammers. On the tables are small nosegays in metal vases.

The head waiter unenthusiastically shows me to a table. There is an immense pause (I was new to things then. Later I came to accept these pauses as inevitable). In the middle of the room there is a fountain splashing into a pleasant tiled pool. But I do what Hollywood calls a double-take as I glance at my fellow guests.

Nearby a man in a bright green shirt and no tie carelessly combs his hair at table. (My astonishment at this again betrayed the fact that I was a newcomer. Russian men comb their hair constantly in public.) The girl with him betrays signs of being about to pass out. At the next table a man *has* passed out. He lies face downwards on the table, while his companions pursue their conversation. There are many Army officers accompanied by women. Champagne corks are banging away, and I notice that a carafe of vodka followed by several bottles of beer is highly regarded as a chaser combination.

Two uniformed men are dining together. They look like Armenians, with dark, flashing good looks, and they toast one another in pink champagne. The women's clothes are painfully unattractive. There seems to be no space set aside for dancing and couples are lurching about among the tables more or less in time to the music. Some are dancing over by the door, where there is a little room, and others are gathered thick beneath the band dais. The band plays an occasional fox-trot mixed in with waltzes, gypsy tunes, boompies marches and what I take to be popular Soviet melodies. Table manners are not good. People tend to crouch forward until they are almost resting their chins on the edge of the table, shovelling in their food. There is a great deal of tooth sucking and lip smacking, and nobody seems to have any notion of keeping the table itself in some sort of order. Plates and cruets and knives and forks and flower vases quickly fuse into an unsightly mass. Nor does it help that the waiters—and this is true everywhere in the country—almost never clear away dirty dishes at the first opportunity. They prefer to leave the dirty dishes from one course until they arrive with the next—which may be forty-five minutes later.

The dancing is highly ungainly by any standards you like to apply. It matches neither the flamboyant expertise of a *palais de danse*, nor the sophisticated shuffle of a West End nightclub. The men in their bell-bottomed trousers and the women with their bulky, thick-waisted figures and grotesque gowns, move about bobbing their shoulders up and down in time to the beat and hoping for the best. The whole scene is inescapably provincial—but 1900-style provincial.

Ah, here's my meal. A big portion of glistening caviar in a glass pot, toast, a large square of butter, chopped onion, and a carafe of vodka. Then fried chicken, a bottle of too sweet red wine, and coffee. Should I tip? Tentatively I leave some money, but it was quite unnecessary to be furtive about it. The only people I ever encountered in the USSR who refused a tip were—and then only occasionally—the taxi-drivers. The Intourists representatives always frowned when they saw me producing a tip—the frown deepening when they saw it accepted. Tipping is supposed to be incompatible with human dignity of the individual in a Progressive Socialist Democracy, but tipping is clearly something that nobody and no government in this world is ever going to know how to stop.

It's just the same as anywhere else—ten per cent, or a little more if you feel like it. Sometimes in the provinces a waiter would make a show of refusing a tip and ask me whether I couldn't let him have cigarettes instead. I would explain that I am a non-smoker and re-proffer the tip, whereupon it would usually be pocketed without more ado.

## CHAPTER XII

### May 1, Tovarisch

**MAY DAY**—one of the great days in the calendar of the USSR—and people are busy wishing one another “A merry First of May, Tovarisch!” I am early astir, for at the last moment I have been given an invitation to watch the goings-on from beside the Lenin-Stalin tomb in Red Square.

This business of coming through with something at the last moment just when hope seems dead is characteristic of life in the USSR. During my first few days in Moscow I put in for a ticket to visit the Kremlin for the opening of the Supreme Soviet’s spring session. I made many telephone calls to the Foreign Ministry, but the voices that answered me seemed to become less and less sanguine of my chances. But why? I asked. What was the difficulty? “Ah, there are complications . . .” The Supreme Soviet was due to meet at 2 p.m. on the opening day, and as one o’clock drew near I shrugged and decided to forget it. Instead I embarked on lunch. The hands of the clock were pointing to precisely two, and I was halfway through my meal, when a courier rushed into the dining-room of the hotel and exclaimed: “Gospodeen MacColl! Here is your ticket of admission to the Supreme Soviet! Quickly!” I grabbed the ticket, called for a taxi and got to a seat in the press gallery just twenty minutes late.

When things got rather tense over an official ban on my projected visit to Baku, the big oil port on the Caspian Sea, I had about given up hope of being allowed to go, but decided to deliver a last angry protest. I was sitting in my hotel room, roughing out in my mind the form my protest would take when, just as I was about to reach for my telephone, it rang. The Foreign Ministry was on the line. There was some talk about the trip, and then the official said: “There is no

air connection between Bilisi and Baku, so from Bilisi you will have to take the train." "But," I said, "I am not going to Baku." "Why, do you no longer want to?" "No—I'm not allowed to." "But of course you are allowed to. You will no doubt enjoy it very much." Just like that—most casual thing in the world. What ever gave me the idea I couldn't go? That is very much the Soviet way of yielding a point. Something may have been the subject of the most passionate discussion, but if it is finally decided to give in, there is no business of "Here is some good news for you," or "Well, as a special concession, we are prepared to . . ." The decision is just quietly tossed into the conversation almost as an afterthought.

Same with this ticket for the May Day parade. I had not expected any great difficulty over it, but time dragged on, my colleagues permanently stationed in Moscow had all been promised theirs, but still there continued to be doubt about mine. Then suddenly it was Friday, April 30th, and I was still ticketless for the ceremony of the next morning.

At 5 p.m. that afternoon the telephone rang. If I could present myself at the annexe to the Foreign Ministry as soon as convenient I would find a ticket for the May Day parade. I went out into the street. Moscow was warming up for the big day and a carefree spirit was evident. The drunks were reeling along the pavements or quietly falling down. In the USSR a traditionally tolerant view is taken of drunkenness. The police will be extraordinarily lenient—unless drunkenness leads to bodily violence, destruction of property or what is loosely termed "hooliganism". A man almost never gets charged simply with being drunk. If he is hopelessly incapacitated and has no friend handy to cart him home, the police will take him along to sober him up. But as soon as he has done so he is sent about his business. . . . Taxis were all taken that eve-of-holiday afternoon and at last I had to settle for an enormous Zis, the car that is painstakingly modelled on the pre-war Packard. I remember that the not very long drive to the Foreign Ministry, the brief wait while I got the ticket, and back again to the hotel cost me the equivalent of £6 with tip. But anyway I had my ticket.

May Day was bright and clear—Malenkov weather. I



breakfasted with a group of British businessmen who had been pursuing a series of elusive contracts with varying success for the past several weeks, and then we all set off together for Red Square, for the Foreign Trade Ministry had given them tickets also. The May Day procession, or "demonstration", as it is called, is in two parts. First the military to start things off, and then the civilians. Time was when the demonstration took up most of the day, but this year it was streamlined and, in keeping with the playing up of MNYP-MNYPY, the military part lasted less than half an hour. But that twenty-three minutes had been sedulously rehearsed. During the preceding fortnight there had been nocturnal "dry runs", and more than once I stood in the near-zero weather at midnight in Gorki Street and watched the formidable mass of machines and men tuning up.

I had been intrigued by the careful rehearsal of a chorused shout from the men standing in the gigantic armoured troop carriers—it sounded something like the slavish version of a college yell at an American football match. Their officers had made them go through it again and again until they were shout perfect. On the great day I heard the results, for as Marshal Bulganin, reviewing the troops, passed slowly along the ranks standing up in a powder-blue Zis convertible, his car would pause every so often and the marshal would call out: "I wish you well, my men!" Back would come the answering roar that I had heard in rehearsal: "Rad Starahsa Marshal Sovietskogo sousa!"—"We are happy to have the chance of serving you, O Marshal!"

One very cold rehearsal night as I was walking home I wondered if the vodka I had had at dinner had suddenly hit me an unlooked-for blow. For before me I saw a whole squareful of Red soldiers waltzing violently round with one another in their greatcoats. It turned out that this is a sensible notion to keep the cold at bay. Men who would otherwise stand motionless for hours as they line the streets or squares are occasionally ordered to limber up. They promptly grab the nearest men by the belt and swing him around, then cannon off him to the next and so forth. It looks like a crowd of uniformed bears dancing cheerfully in the moonlight.

Imagine a big procession in London, going on for hours on end, with several hundred thousand people marching past the saluting base. A procession that is part glittering military display, part dashing aerial fly-past, and part tremendous civilian carnival. You would expect that to attract a huge crowd of onlookers, pavements black with people for miles on end and so on. But in Moscow not so. Throughout a large area all round the Kremlin the pavements are bare—cleared by the police. Except for the handpicked few in Red Square, party diplomats, journalists, foreign military attachés and some big shots, nobody looks on.

Why? Because, I was told, it is a demonstration *by* the people. They, the people, are tramping along the roads, so how could they also be watching from the pavements?

It is not intended as a spectacle; it is a demonstration (one or two of my informants even used the word “spontaneous” demonstration) of affection for and solidarity with the Comrade leaders of the Kremlin.

Lilac-coloured pass in hand, I made my way slowly up the rather steep little street that leads into Red Square. On my right the pink crenellated walls and green towers of the Kremlin. On the left, taking up their stations on the cobbles of the square itself the well-drilled and excellently turned out troops.

From scores of loudspeakers comes the heartening tootle of martial airs. From the surrounding buildings hang the blood-red banners and the streamers and the slogans: “In honour of the glorious peoples of the Soviet Union, uncrushable citadel of peace throughout the world”; “Forward together as brotherly champions of peace” is the motif. My place is on the left of the tomb, where there are rows of concrete terraces for the diplomats and the journalists. You don’t sit at this function—nobody does. It is a standing affair only. To the right of the tomb are Soviet guests of honour, foreign Communist delegations, Soviet high military brass, and the foreign military attachés.

What a strange life a military attaché leads. In any foreign country to which he gets assigned, his is rather an unusual post. But a Western military attaché in the USSR stands out like the sorest of thumbs. In a land where any foreigner is auto-

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matically suspect, the military attaché practically sets the alarm bells ringing and lights up the juke box every time he sets foot outside his embassy. None are so anxiously watched as he.

But on the big occasion, such as May Day, the foreign military attachés do a Cinderella act. There they are in full uniform, with medals, being greeted with every punctilio and even cordiality by their Soviet opposite numbers. Escorted politely to their places of honour, they wait in the sunshine for the show to begin. For the nonce their hosts are not trying to conceal everything possible and nail down the furniture because the attachés are about—they are actually willing to show them something.

True, it is a little like a modified strip-tease act, with the seductive performer notably failing to heed the hoarse cries of "Take it off!" at the end. But it is worth seeing all the same. The show is a very nicely judged affair—the foreigners must be shown just enough to set them asking questions, but on no account sufficient to allow them to answer any.

This year the tit-bit was the giant jet bomber with acutely swept-back wings that nipped over Red Square at the start of the fly past. To the untutored eye she looked enormous, and the effect was enhanced by her escort of tiny jet fighters that resembled triangular confetti alongside her.

Presumably the Soviets had calculated that the brief flash of time during which this bomber was in view would not enable even those experts who knew exactly what to look for and who had the quality of total recall, to see as much as they would have liked.

But first we had the sight of Malenkov and the others marching upstairs to their places on the Tomb. Ten o'clock was clanging as they emerged from the Tomb's front door (they had reached the mausoleum by an underground passage from the Kremlin) and moving past MVD men at the present arms, made for the pink marble stairway that leads up to the various levels of the Tomb.

Gone are the days when the Politburo members stressed their dislike of "bourgeois conventionality" by appearing for such occasions in flat caps and "party tunics". This year there wasn't a cap to be seen on the Tomb. In fact the line

of men—except for a brace of marshals—resembled, at least from a distance, American businessmen in faultless fedoras and light topcoats. Halfway up the stairway Malenkov pauses and politely doffs his fedora in the direction of the diplomats down below, his plump cheeks appearing to dimple as he does so. (Not so plump as they were, I am told. Moscow colleagues assure me that he has lost some weight in the past year, though not as the result of ill-health.)

Malenkov, Khrushchev, Mikoyan, Kaganovich (the only Jew left in the Politburo; Jewish representation in the upper levels of the Soviet Government has dropped far from the days of the nineteen-twenties and early 'thirties) and other topshots take their places at the topmost level. The smaller fry cluster on the next terrace down.

Earlier I wrote of "uniformed" and "plain clothes" MVD men. I'm not sure that was strictly accurate. For today's turn-out of nominally plain-clothes MVD is on a terrific scale—and they might just as well have been in uniform.

They all wore blue fuzzy fedoras, blue overcoats, blue pin-stripe suits, and bright brown or yellow shoes. And they seemed to be at everyone's elbow all the time, watching every movement in the big crowd of diplomats and journalists, keeping their backs to the procession so that they could get a good look at us, trying to overhear what we said to one another, and even making none too unostentatious attempts to read our notes over our shoulders.

As I saw later on, it was the same thing in the section on the other side of the tomb—the blue fedoras bobbed about unabashedly among the military uniforms.

When the military part of the parade was over—and it made a great deal of noise, produced clouds of petrol fumes, shook the ground and looked most impressive, at least to a layman—the "people's demonstration" got under way. Now came a commotion. Although the use of cameras by foreigners was strictly forbidden while the troops and planes were going past, it was announced as a special concession by a representative of the Foreign Ministry that we would be allowed to take pictures of the civilian parade. (It didn't seem like much of a "concession" to me, but then I was still new to the USSR.)

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But when the head of the civilian column started to approach beneath a mass of banners and garlands, and two visiting Frenchmen unslung their cameras, there was instant uproar. The MVD told them nothing doing. The Frenchmen angrily told them not to be silly—they had just been given express permission. Doesn't matter, said the MVD, no pictures here. But it's crazy, said the Frenchmen—why can't we take pictures of the civilians? Never mind why—it is not being permitted, retorted the MVD.

After a great deal of argument the man from the Foreign Affairs Ministry was suddenly spotted, vainly attempting to look unconcerned. He was hailed by the Frenchmen and reluctantly approached. His intervention was brushed aside in a quick whisper from one of the MVD men. Sorry, he said—no pictures after all.

The Soviet marshals look smart in their blue-green uniforms—but if only their figures were better. An informal note is apparent. As soon as the military parade is ended and the civilians are tramping past—two of the Soviet marshals produce a paper bag and placidly munch apples out of it together.

Women are going the rounds with ice cream. People push forward to buy the cones; also oranges, for at this time of the year these are rare and greatly prized.

As I look down the hill that leads into Red Square it seems as if the whole of the Soviet Union is moving up for the review, a solid wedge of marching men, women and children, with the thick fringe of banners held aloft. The first few squads, of gymnasts, athletes and red-scarved "Pioneers", all wearing uniform, march with exuberant elbows-out style. But soon the parade has settled into a massive shuffle-past of everyone and anyone. Someone is playing a trombone, scores give out a quick flourish on accordions. Parents carry children on their shoulders and help the tots to wave in the right direction—Malenkov-wards. Someone looses a whole lot of red balloons and another citizen with a sense of the appropriate, a white pigeon, which does just the right things, first fluttering about Malenkov's shoulders, and then coming gracefully to roost on the Tomb's flat top.

A phalanx of pretty, well-dressed children is up near the

front, and from them dash one or two lucky ones to present garlands to the Government men—and to be rewarded by an avuncular bussing from Malenkov.

One effective trick is when a squad of marchers comes level with the Tomb and all suddenly give an eyes right and simultaneously hoist a miniature forest of artificial flowers over their heads. Malenkov nods and grins and waves. So does Khrushchev. So does everyone else.

There is a great jungle of placards giving details of what the various workers have done, what goals have been reached and what "norms" rendered abnormal. Everyone wants to get into the act—and does. Here come the film artists, and the élite workers. Now a delegation from the Ukraine. Now the farm workers, smiling happily, for the troubles on the Virgin lands have not yet been made known by *Pravda*.

As soon as they pass the Tomb they encounter lines of troops and police strung out in carefully planned formations which split the marchers into minor streams to filter them past the hunched-up piece of Turkish Delight that is St. Basil's and so away into oblivion to await next year's summons.

The whole affair is orchestrated by an MC at a loudspeaker, who never lets up for a moment. He is like one of the characters who undertake a twelve-hour non-stop appearance on American TV for some charity. He really gives it all he's got, his amplified great voice booming and thundering as he keeps up a running commentary of Orders of the Day, plugs for peace, praise of the Communist Party, a nice mention of Malenkov, and a tip-off on who is coming into sight now. Every few minutes he calls for a cheer—and then gives it himself, gigantic, inescapable, "OOOO—ooo—rah", on a long descending note. When at last he pauses briefly, the genuine voices and cries sound as spindly as those of seagulls, and you wonder whether anyone finds it worthwhile to join in the cheers, when that huge amplified cheer not only leads but overwhelms all else.

The parade was enlivened by the presence of what may well be the only uninvited member who ever participated in it. One of the British businessmen onlookers began to tire of his passive role after the second hour or so. He had thoughtfully provided himself with some bright red ski-ing trousers and

these he pulled from his pocket and forced on over the trousers of his lounge suit. He then casually drifted out into the procession, linked arms with the nearest marcher and boldly made his way past the saluting base.

This experience he enjoyed so much that he repeated it several times, passing and re-passing the saluting base in his scarlet trousers like the member of a stage army in a No 3 touring company. The other marchers seemed a bit puzzled by this unaccountable addition to the proceedings, but nothing was said.

Getting from Red Square back to the Metropole to write my story was a tedious business. Enormous columns of people were camped in the roadways, waiting the signal to pick up speed and head for the Tomb. Men were playing volleyball while they waited, and women were dancing to mouth-organs and accordion music. In the USSR it is not considered unusual for two people of the same sex to dance together, although you see more female couples than male.

Several times as I later travelled about the country I saw nothing but all-female couples on a dance floor—perhaps nine or ten couples, while a group of unattached youths watched glumly. “Why don’t they ask the girls for a dance?” I once asked. “They are being very shy and retiring,” was the answer.

A plotting of my course back to the hotel on May Day would have shown a track like a fever chart. There was line after line of police and troops and I quickly found that it was no use getting bogged down in an argument. I would produce my lilac pass, and then my special Soviet passport, for all foreigners staying any length of time in the USSR must have one of those. If the policeman or soldier wavered at all at this display of documents I would smile and slip past with a murmured “Posholista”. If on the other hand the scowl was intensified, I would fade off in a quiet lateral movement, waiting for a while until I could again probe the defences to try to uncover a soft spot.

In between the many encounters with the authorities I found myself picking my way through the mass of citizens making merry, now dodging a volleyball, now finding myself sur-

rounded by a group of peasants wearing their rusty best, and once, to my consternation, doing a few waltz steps with a woman who had apparently tired of female partners.

From the Metropole back to the Telegraph Office was a repeat. Finally my message was handed in and I made for a late lunch.

Over the caviar and vodka a British businessman—not the one who had marched past the Tomb in the morning, but another equally carefree—propounded the suggestion that we should return to Red Square and there make our way to the enclosure on the right of the saluting base, the one reserved for the VIPs.

It seemed a hopeless task, but off we went. Thinking each hold-up would be the last, I counted them. We were asked what we thought we were up to seventeen times while we covered perhaps an eighth of a mile.

There really seemed no reason why we should have been allowed back. I showed my lilac pass, but all it said was that I had had a seat reserved for me five hours earlier, and in a different part of the stands.

Several times we got mixed up temporarily with the marchers (who by now were starting to look exhausted, for it had been a long day). It is not an easy thing to nip laterally between two marching files, at the same time maintaining a forward progress. Anyone doing that is conspicuous, let me tell you. I can recommend two techniques, in case you should ever find yourself in that sort of predicament. The first is to scutter right down between the two files from one edge to the other in a swift movement, trying to make yourself seem apologetic. The other is to move to what is roughly the centre of the two files, then stay there for about a dozen steps or so, brazening it out with broad smiles and encouraging remarks about the weather in English. After my experience in the morning I knew it was no use tangling with army privates or the Soviet equivalent of police constables. They are short men, but they are determined men, and they know their orders. Whenever we ran up against yet another line of uniformed defenders, I would say "officier" loudly (Why? I don't think it is Russian) and make for the nearest officer.



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The officers always looked puzzled, hesitant—but finally let us through. But the last lap was the hardest.

Here we found ourselves bashing right across the middle of Red Square, only a few yards to the right of the Tomb, and not only trying to cut clear across the oncoming mass of marchers but once again mingling with the procession itself. But we finally made it and clambered up the cement VIP terraces.

The original occupants of these had thinned out under the hot sun as the hours went by. The Chinese military attaché was still present, but I noticed he was sitting down with a discouraged air, resting his feet. A large group of Italian Communists were still in attendance, but also looking a bit wilted. Only the demon commentator was still going strong, roaring and gesticulating and oorah-ing from his lookout on the Tomb. Malenkov wasn't visible any more—but Khrushchev was still there and doffing his fedora hat with undiminished ardour to those who still tramped by, nearly six hours after the show had begun.

The place wasn't in very trim shape. Orange peel and paper packaging, and what had once been ice-cream containers and the wrappings of the hopeful sandwiches of early dawn were scattered about on and under the cement ridges.

But the MVD did not relax—and all things considered, my fedora was off to them. Although those they had come to keep an eye on had thinned out so noticeably, the little men in their blue coats and yellow shoes still stood there, darting their eyes around professionally. As far as I could tell, no MVD man had broken ranks.

And, at the back of the concrete stands, in a sort of sunken lane, I saw something which I had not known about in the morning, when all the crowds were around and everything was brisk and cheerful and protocol was to the fore.

In that sunken lane as I glanced round I saw a mass of MVD troops. They were fine physical specimens. They were alert and watchful. Each man held an automatic gun at the port position in both hands.

Just in case.

## CHAPTER XIII

# Salesman for the Sugar Pills

I WENT to the USSR determined to remain even-tempered, to be objective, to give the Soviets credit for achievement.

These resolutions were hard to stick to. I found two things about my treatment which were irritating. First, the insistence by the authorities that as far as possible I should see only the "shop window" side of life in Russia—a tourist's sugar pill. Second, the sort of minds of the dedicated Communists with whom I came in contact, principally the guides and interpreters, both male and female, of Intourist.

The minds and manners of these guides, specially picked, I suppose, to handle western visitors, were a mixture of aggressiveness, xenophobia, absolute refusal to admit that anything was wrong in Russia, and a determination to "cover up" on shortcomings.

So although I kept reminding myself, "Now, take it easy. Don't get drawn into an argument. Just listen to what they have to say," I found that sooner or later I would be swapping verbal punches.

Conversation with a typical Soviet citizen is quite unlike normal conversation as we know it. There is little easy give-and-take. You quickly find that the Soviet man or woman is constantly on the lookout to try and score a debating point, or make a sort of smart alec retort that brings you up short. After several doses of this I said to myself, "All right, brother, if you want to play it that way—here goes."

Here are some snatches of conversation with young Soviet men and women who were my escorts or guides at various times.

One of the most glaring weaknesses of the Soviet economy is the bad cement. Wherever you go you see cement cracking

and flaking, although it may only have been laid quite recently. Many times, as I made my way through a brand-new Palace of Culture or whatever, I saw where great wedge-shaped pieces of cement had fallen out of the stairways and been replaced. You can see the cement crumbling into decay in the most modern buildings, such as the great new stadium at Baku. This can hold 70,000 and is said to be the pride and joy of the citizens. But the place—only put up three years ago—is already in terrible condition. Great damp marks disfigure the triumphal pillared entrance, and piles of bricks and tiles sit around waiting for someone to get busy on the repairs. Inside it is the same story, with cracks and mould and damp marks everywhere. So much Soviet construction seems to be rotten before it's ripe.

So when I caught sight of a half-finished building in a new housing project (the scaffolding was still about it, and the roof had yet to be added) from which the cement was flaking off in chunks, I said to my guide: "How do you account for the poor-quality cement?" She replied, without batting an eyelid, "Oh, that is one of the oldest buildings in town!"

The housing shortage is a nagging crisis in the USSR. Hundreds of thousands of families inside Russia live crammed into one or two dismal rooms, or sharing a flat with another family.

And so the Soviet authorities stress the great reconstruction drive that is going on. At first glance, this does seem impressive. In nearly every town in European Russia that I visited there did seem to be a great deal of new building going on.

On all sides there are scaffolded buildings, great girders poking skywards, cranes and bulldozers and all the other evidence of a building drive in full flood.

But the odd thing was that nearly all these buildings lacked one important detail—workers.

At first I would say, "Tell me, why are there no workmen, or workwomen, finishing that building?"

"Oh, Meester MacColl, it is being lunch time."

"Here, Meester MacColl, weel be soon the new Soviet building for our city. It will be seven tales, you say? No, excuse it please, seven storeys. It is fine?"

"Yes, but why is no one working on it?"

"Ah, it is a holiday."

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"But it doesn't seem to be a holiday for anyone else."

"Ah, no. The beelding workers have special holiday."

We drive up to a new cinema.

"A lovely beelding, Meester MacColl?"

"I think it may be when it is finished. But why is no one working on it?"

"The workers are at present attending a meeting. They will return soon."

After a bit I started to provide the answers myself. "Ah, here is a fine building," (I would say), "but as no one is working on it, I suppose it is lunch time?" (10 a.m.)

"Yes, that is so."

"Here is another splendid building with no workers in view. But doubtless it is still lunch time?" (11 a.m.)

"Yes, perhaps."

"Ah, now I wonder why there are no workers on this Lenin-Stalin Study Centre? Could it still be lunch time?" (Midday.)

"It is now time to go to the museum."

In Tashkent I said plainly to the Party member who took me round that my impression was that the Soviet building task force was spread too thin, had bitten off more than it could chew, and that the authorities had decided to pursue the lesser of two evils. Therefore the scheme was to half-build as many things as possible, so that there should be the widest possible evidence of endeavour. Half a loaf better than no bread, in fact.

My man considered this for a long time. Then, to my amazement, he remarked, "Here I think you are being right."

Back in Moscow I took this up again. My guide this time was an outstandingly intelligent young man, and he gave me an elaborate explanation of how it only *seemed* that buildings were abandoned half-finished. It appeared that since "all building in the Soviet Union is now mechanised", a roving task force of experts would swoop down on building after building, and in the space of a few hours add another storey before speeding on somewhere else.

"This is going on all over Moscow, Meester MacColl."

"Well," I said, "what about that huge derelict building down on the banks of the Moscow river, not far from the Kremlin? I noted that one the second day I arrived, and now,

eleven weeks later, nothing at all has been done to it. The rusty girders still stand naked, those big cranes are still poised above it, with no one manning them——”

“Ah, Meester MacColl, it so happens that you have picked on the one exception. Work on this important building has been indeed halted.”

“Why?”

“Well, the plans were suddenly changed in the middle of the operation. It will now be made far, far bigger than was at first imagined possible.”

“Bigger? What, upwards or outwards?”

“That is remaining to be seen.”

And yet somehow the buildings do get finished. Badly battered cities of the Ukraine have been almost completely put together again since the fighting ended nine years ago. In Kharkov the chief architect told me, “Everyone in the city helped in the rebuilding—men, women and children turned themselves into building workers.”

But it looked to me as though the USSR could do with a great many more of those roving task forces. Certainly there was a huge number of buildings awaiting their attentions.

No one warned me about the standard Soviet alibis, but I soon found them out for myself. The Soviets will almost never say frankly that you can't visit such and such a factory or else that they don't want you to. There is always a far-fetched excuse. Favourites: “The factory is closed for repairs.” “The manager has been called away from the factory, and the assistant manager has gone with him.” “The manager, the assistant manager, the chief engineer, and the general supervisor have become suddenly ill.”

The most uproarious excuse of all was when some westerners had arranged to visit an artists' school in Soviet Central Asia. They were told at the last moment that they could not go after all, because “the building is being unexpectedly white-washed”.

My first exposure to this sort of nonsense took place in Bilisi, the capital of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic.

It had been put to me that I might like to visit a “champagne factory”. This sounded like something not to be missed. The

notion that champagne could be produced in a factory was entrancing, and I longed to compare the technique with the processes that I have watched in Rheims and Epernay. Perhaps they caught the glint in my eye. At all events, I was told that unfortunately I could not go after all. Why? "The director has been called away from the factory." Where has he gone? "He is somewhere in Bilisi, but cannot be traced." What about the associate director? "He too is somewhere in Bilisi and cannot be traced." Well, I'm not particular—why not let me go round the place with some lesser official?

"Oh, this is being impossible."

Perhaps Meester MacColl would settle for something else? Yes, all right, I said, I would like to visit the local lunatic asylum. Horrified pause. The *what*? The local lunatic asylum—I am sure that the Soviet treatment of lunatics is both humane and up-to-date. Very well, we shall see what can be done. Tomorrow we shall tell you.

Next day: it is being impossible to visit the lunatic asylum. Why? The director is being far too busy. I see—then I can assume that there are many lunatics in Bilisi? Oh, no—that is—well, there are not so many mad ones, but the director is very busy with the ones that there are. . . .

When I went to say goodbye at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs I wound up with what I thought would be a polite curtain line. As I rose to go, I said lightly with a smile: "Well, I hope that some day I shall return to the Soviet Union."

The official who was taking my farewell did not just let that drift with the tide, as anyone else would have done anywhere else in the world. Instead he pondered the point, and then said solemnly: "The question of your possible re-entry into the Soviet Union will no doubt be considered by the competent authorities."

Compliments are never accepted as compliments. They are always given a quick sniffing over, and then tossed back at you. You say how well someone is doing a job, as one would, out of politeness, in the West. Back, like a piece of elastic snapped in your face, comes the favourite phrase, "And why not?" And then, "After all, why should not this task be well done? It is what this person is supposed to do efficiently."

I got used to the "And why not?" (pronounced "End why naht?") routine. I suppose it is all part of the inferiority complex which hag-rides the Soviet front-runners. They realise that most of the time the inquiring western visitor is told no, he can't see this, and no, he can't go there. So when the opportunity comes for saying yes, they don't just say yes, but "And why not?"—thus imparting a top-dressing of rebuke to their agreement.

To be fair to these guides and interpreters, they are unaccustomed to dealing with anyone except simpletons. Normally the only clients who troop through the museums and art galleries and parks of culture and rest are either the bemused peasantry, ready to gape in obedient wonder at anything they are shown, or else the "shock troops", the young pioneers, the Komsomol kids, the dedicated, hard-faced, worked-over toughs who laugh at religion, scoff at ideals and are the robots of "dialectical materialism".

"This that you say is very strange"—how often did I hear this remark. Out in Soviet Central Asia I got into an argument with an Intourist guide, who asked me what I did not like about the USSR. I took a deep breath and then said, "Well, just for a start, I don't like doing my job under a censorship." "But how are you knowing that there is a censorship?"

I went up to my room, fetched a cable from a file I had with me, and displayed one of my messages with the censor's official stamp at the bottom of the page, and several lines blacked out. "This", I said, "is what gives me the impression that the Soviet Union maintains a censorship." The "This is very strange" that followed was one of the faintest I heard.

Q.: Why so few dogs to be seen in the Soviet Union?

A.: Because if you keep a dog as a pet it means that some of the time which you otherwise would be devoting to your work is spent in looking after the pet. Thus you are not so useful a person to yourself or to your fellow workers. Therefore it is not good to own a dog.

(More likely explanation: overcrowded living conditions are bad enough as it is without adding a dog to the congestion.)

Q.: Why did my train stop so many times in the night?

JUST BACK FROM RUSSIA

A.: But it is always like that, is it not, where trains are concerned?

Q.: Why can't I buy a map of the Soviet Union anywhere?

A.: Because it is the time of the school examinations and so the children have bought them all.

Q.: What about religion?

A.: It is only for the old. No young people are interested in it.

Q.: What takes the place of religion for the young people?

A.: The Komsomol youth clubs. If you have never heard of God then you can manage very well without.

Q.: Do you never have any sense of wanting a spiritual side to life?

A (laughing): None whatever. The scientist has his science—that is his spiritual need satisfied. The engineer his machines.

Q.: Is your outlook completely materialistic?

A.: Yes, completely. But isn't everyone's? Who has ideals in the world today? In any case religion, was closely connected with the class system and with Reaction.

Q. (after watching some boxing): Why did the referee do all that counting while the men were still on their feet? In England we don't start a count till one of the men is floored.

A.: In the Soviet Union we are more humane. It is not necessary to fell the opponent brutally.

Q. (in Tashkent): How far are we from Baku?

A.: By railway or aeroplane?

Q.: Just the distance—how many kilometers?

A.: This I shall try to find out, but it is not easy.

Q.: Whyever not?

A.: It is difficult.

(Three days later.)

Q.: Well, how far is Tashkent from Baku?

A.: I have not been able to discover this, I am sorry.

Q.: But why don't you call the airport and ask them?

A.: This is not advisable.

Q.: How many passenger cars are now being produced in the USSR?

A.: I was told this figure but I have forgotten it.

(Best-informed estimate, about 100,000 a year.)



Q.: Do you believe that the USA is preparing for an aggressive war against the USSR?

A.: Yes, I think so.

Q.: Do you like individual Americans?

A.: They try to go to places where they are not supposed to, and to see things which they are expressly forbidden to see. In this way they show gross disrespect to the Soviet Union.

Q.: How do you imagine the United States to be?

A.: There must be good Americans in the population, but the government is fascist and aggressive and corrupt. In Washington the corruption is terrible. During the war the young Russian people danced American dances, the "jitter" and the "lindy". But after the war it was quickly seen that such dances were in reality decadent.

Q.: What, because they were American?

A.: It was seen that they were decadent—and American. The old people intervened to stop these exhibitions. At first the young people were doubtful, saying "If you wish us to stop the 'jitter' you must put something in its place. What have you to suggest?" But the old people said "Aha, just so. We are suggesting that you are putting in its place the old, graceful ballroom dances." The young people are seeing the force of the argument and so the "jitter" is doomed.

Q.: I've noticed that people in this corner of the Soviet Union don't seem to care for the Turks. Is this because of the historical tradition of enmity with the Turks?

A.: No. It is not in the Soviet nature to hate an entire people. We dislike the Turks because they have given the USA permission to build air bases on their territory. From these bases the Americans threaten us with atomic weapons.

Q.: You feel that Tiflis might be No. 1 on the Hit Parade in the event of war?

A.: Just so.

I am flying north over Kazakhstan, and we come suddenly upon the flourishing industrial town of Balhatch, on the northern shore of Lake Balhatch. Scores of tall chimneys dominate the place, and a great pall of smoke hangs above it. It is obviously an important part of the asiatic arsenal of the USSR.

## JUST BACK FROM RUSSIA

Staring down at this industrial town, rearing up out of the desert, miles from anywhere else, I mused on what the inhabitants could find to do in their spare time.

*MacColl:* I wonder what the people of Balhatch do with themselves?

*Guide:* Oh, they are all simple fishermen and spend their time fishing in the lake.

(*Scene:* A restaurant in Kazakhstan. A small boy wanders in begging. He gets short shrift at the other tables, but when he comes to ours, I give him a rouble.)

*MacColl:* Why is this boy begging?

*Guide:* I cannot imagine. I have never seen such a thing before. It is very strange.

*MacColl:* Could it be that his parents are out of work?

*Guide:* Absolutely not. There is no unemployment in the USSR.

*MacColl:* About that—you know all those thousands of old women who chip the ice off the streets in Moscow in the winter?

*Guide:* Well—yes.

*MacColl:* What becomes of them in the summer?

*Guide:* Oh, they get other jobs—street-cleaning and things like that.

*MacColl:* But you mean they snap straight from one job to another? There is never even temporary unemployment?

*Guide:* Never. As I say, it has been abolished here.

(Driving along on the outskirts of a city.)

*MacColl:* These are terrible-looking hovels.

*Guide:* Oh, these are abandoned—nobody lives in them any longer.

(A woman emerges from one, carrying a baby.)

*Guide:* Well, they will soon be abandoned, I think.

(Tashkent, where it had taken great persistence to get shown the Uzbek market in the native city.)

*MacColl:* What a lively scene.

*Guide* (snorting): In two years this place will have been pulled down, I am glad to say. It is an anachronism, not at all in keeping with progressive principles. I am very sorry that we have come here.

## JUST BACK FROM RUSSIA

*MacColl:* Oh, come now. It's not as bad as that.

*Guide:* We ought to have gone to the museum.

*MacColl:* I've seen enough museums for the time being. I think this market is picturesque and attractive.

*Guide:* To each his own taste.

Questions that *I* got asked. "Is England a part of the USSR?" "America is a town, is it not? But where is this town situated?" "What work does Mrs. Anthony Eden do?" "What work does your wife do?" "Why does America wish to attack Russia with the H-bomb?" "Was President Roosevelt assassinated? If only he had lived there would have been no falling out between East and West after 1945."

"Is British industry totally crippled by strikes?" "Do thousands of people sleep out in the streets of London every night because of the housing shortage?" "Was London really bombed during the war?" "You say it was—but surely not very seriously?" "Why do not the British listen more respectfully to the words of the Dean of Canterbury? He is a functionary of the British church, but it does not seem to matter to him that we do not believe in religion."

"Is it true that the British miners are driven into the pits by troops using guns?" "What is meant by the American Way of Life?" "Life in America for the masses is a sordid existence of poverty, hunger and crime, is it not?"

*MacColl:* What gives you that idea?

*Soviet Citizen:* We have read the works of Howard Fast and Albert Maltz and they graphically describe the terrible conditions.

*MacColl:* But Fast and Maltz are notoriously pro-Communist. They write what they know you like to read. Anyway, supposing there were two Russian authors who were living in Moscow and who started to write books attacking conditions in the USSR. How long do you suppose they would last under *your* regime?

*Soviet Citizen:* This that you say is very strange.

A sidelight on the quaint notions current about the West: when western diplomats are finishing their terms in Moscow and are getting ready to leave for home they often find their

Russian servants adopting an air of sympathy. "How sad," say the servants, "now you will have to give all your pretty china back to the state, and your wife will have to surrender those lovely clothes of hers and go back to wearing ordinary things."

It turns out that the servants are told that western diplomats coming to Moscow merely borrow their clothes and personal effects from their governments for the duration, in order to impress the Russians as a propaganda gesture, rather like a Hollywood starlet borrowing a mink from the studio for an evening out at Romanoffs.

A tiresome detail of life with the Intourist guides is that they will never let you take anything for granted, or, once you have embarked on a tour of a museum or art gallery, allow you to leave until every last nook and cranny of the place and every exhibit has been duly scrutinized.

There can never be any browsing through such a place. If you are going to "do" it, "do" it you must, and no cultural heel-taps. Many were the struggles I put up to avoid seeing some irrelevant part of a museum—the geological section, for instance, of the Tashkent Historical Museum. But not a chance. The custodian would not hear of this reprehensible skipping.

And I suppose it is the habit of dealing usually with literal-minded and none too well educated people that causes the guides to go into such redundant explanations as that which befell me as I stood trapped in the tiny-tots playroom of a Pioneers Palace in Siberia. The walls were covered with gay representations of Russian folk lore and legends, and I would have been content to give it a nod and a smile and be on my way. But no. Moving clockwise round the room—and so slowly—the guide gave me a complete fill-in on every one of the legends portrayed.

And at the ballet of "The Sleeping Beauty" in Alma Ata, my interpreter in an excess of zeal kept up a running-commentary in loud tones for my benefit right through the performance. In vain I told her that I knew the story—on went the muttering. After all, a moderately bright ten-year old would have needed no explanation. But it didn't matter—on

she went, seemingly impervious to the resentful glances of our neighbours as the preposterous interruptions continued.

You soon find that the average Soviet citizen has a certain knowledge of life in Britain—but that it is strangely old-fashioned. Why? Because the most modern author that any of them has read is Galsworthy (I think the *Forsyte Saga* must be required reading) and nearly all their English reading is of nineteenth-century authors such as Dickens (a great favourite). I heard Shakespeare and Milton warmly praised by a collective farmer.

As far as I could determine, no British author of the past forty years, with the possible exception of H. G. Wells, is at all widely known in the USSR. Once or twice I was asked to name a few modern ones but none of the names I mentioned had ever been heard of.

The vacuum-life inside Soviet Russia extends to ignorance of famous Russians still alive but living abroad. Nobody, even ardent ballet fans, has ever heard of such dancers as Massine or Serge Lifar. But that is not astonishing when you consider that all traces of such once-revered names as those of Trotsky and Beria have been completely expunged from the records of the USSR.

It is a most odd experience to go through the big Lenin Museum in Moscow and find not one single mention of Trotsky or smallest snapshot of him anywhere—the man who collaborated so closely with Lenin through the years of danger and struggle before and after the revolution. It was as if he had never been—and if they can do that to one of their own once-great heroes, it is perhaps hardly surprising that they can re-write history to suit themselves when it comes to determining just who invented what and when.

A colleague who was going through the Lenin Museum, with me turned to the guide as we ended our tour and said: "But is there not anywhere in the museum a picture of Trotsky?" The "Niet" that he got back on that was like a whiplash.

"But you know," I put in mildly, "Trotsky was always hailed as the Founder of the Red Army?" "You have received this information from an unreliable source" returned the guide with an air of finality.

As for Beria, the speed and thoroughness with which they have done a blot-out on him is sensational. It was not yet a year after his execution that I arrived in the USSR, but all trace of Stalin's co-Georgian was long since gone with the wind. Thousands of pictures, photographs, and inscriptions in a land that loves all three had been scrapped and burned and doctored and faked. History books were junked by the hundreds of thousands. Subscribers to the Soviet Encyclopaedia received an urgent communication. They were asked to take "a pair of sharp scissors and cut out a section between certain pages which had been included by error". The section dealt with Beria. Instead, the subscribers were given a substitute section to clip into the encyclopaedia. Its subject: Bering Sea.

Russia is also very fond of the mural, including the mosaic mural. Beria in mosaic was a bit of a problem—but they got around it by covering him up with cement. I can only hope it was the non-flaking kind.

And what about Beria in the thousands of group photographs, showing him right up there with Stalin and Malenkov on countless important occasions? It was a big job—but it was done. You would see a photo hanging in some place of honour in a public building or museum or municipal soviet. Near Stalin would be what looked—all too appropriately—like a ghost, a sort of ectoplasmic exhalation. Comrade B. Or you would see a completely unfamiliar figure amid the smiling comrades. Try as you would, you could not put a name to this man. They had simply painted in a new face on the Beria neck.

Perhaps unkindest of all was that now and then you are apt to see a woman in a big hat standing with Stalin and the Politburo in these photographs. In death poor Beria has been made to change his sex.

Of late years the Soviet authorities have allowed a sort of statute of limitations to apply in the matter of who shall be venerated and who not. If someone like Ivan the Terrible (a title not used in the USSR) lived long enough ago and, better still, got the better of an external enemy, he now takes his place on the Soviet roll of honour. Such men as Marshal

## JUST BACK FROM RUSSIA

Suvarov (1729-1800) (he beat the Turks, took Warsaw, crossed the Alps, fought Napoleon's men), Prince Bagration (1765-1812) (he captured Brescia in Italy, fought the Turks and the Finns), and of course Michael Kutusov, commander of the Russian armies when Napoleon recoiled from Moscow in 1812, are today all highly respected figures.

While I was motoring about Leningrad my guide pointed out several fine equestrian statues of various tsars who still enjoy places of honour in streets and squares. I asked how this could be, since the tsars were symbols of oppression and reaction.

"Ah, you see," he said, "if the statue is fine and pleasing as a work of art the authorities will allow it to stand. They feel that its aesthetic qualities overbalance any political considerations."

"This is now the general rule?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Suppose there had been an aesthetically pleasing statue of Comrade Beria?"

"There was no such aesthetically pleasing statue."

Getting back to the old-fashioned concept of life in Britain, when I told an Intourist official in Moscow that I was about to return to Britain, he said, "So now perhaps you will be enjoying a holiday when you get home?" I said that might well be.

"Let me see," he went on, frowning in concentration. "It is possible that you will go to Grimsby to catch a little fish?"

I repressed a smile and said no, that was not really a very feasible holiday for me to take.

"Ah, then, I know," he went on eagerly. "You are going to the Midlands to play some croquet!"

What echo of some long-forgotten book was in his mind?

He was a nice man—one of the nicest I met in the USSR. An irrepressible British businessman—the one who marched in the May Day procession—rang him up one day to ask for some theatre tickets that night.

"I want two tickets for *Much Ado About Nothing*, please," he said.

"For what?" asked the Intourist man.

"*Much Ado About Nothing*—you know, by the famous Soviet author William Shakespeare."

JUST BACK FROM RUSSIA

A pause. "By *whom* did you say, please?"

"By William Shakespeare—a name revered all over the world as one of Soviet Russia's greatest authors," said the Britisher.

Another pause. Then came the cautious comment, "Somebody jokes?"



## CHAPTER XIV

# Night Train for Baku

EVENING in Bilisi. I am off to catch the night train for Baku, 345 miles away. It will take eighteen hours, which is what it took in 1893. The station is full of people. Soldiers buying ice cream from the girls pushing little carts of the stuff on the platforms. Men in shabby suits drinking mineral water. Women carrying large bundles. Old men with huge white beards. People crossing the fly-over bridge between the platforms are etched dramatically against the pale citron of the ebbing sunset.

I suppose I ought to have been adventurous and travelled "hard". The Intourist people would have been most upset, I am sure—but now that I catch a glimpse of the crowded "hard" carriages, I think that maybe I did the right thing. Anyway I'm not only travelling soft, but as soft as could be, the "International Coach". This means something built around 1907 with a row of queer little ventilators, like chimneys, sticking out of the roof. It is painted green, and has about it the haunting suggestion of better days and different clients. Just the hint of another world, of elegance and style. The elegance and style that can still be seen in such museums as Leningrad's Hermitage. Like the Hermitage this International Coach is really a charming relic, a showpiece, like a spinet lurking in the midst of a third-rate dance band.

I am sharing a two-berth apartment with another traveller. He has the upper, a paunchy, quiet, middle-aged type. He wears white tennis shoes and a darkish, button-down-the-front Party blouse. I smile and murmur something. He reciprocates. We are surrounded by green panels in our little lair. I have brought a bottle of Georgian wine No. 3 from the hotel, and I uncork it and offer him a swig. He waves a deprecating hand,

but I overcome his scruples. He pauses to give a tactfully small sniff at it, finds that it is wine and so nothing to worry about, and takes several hefty gulps. Then he rushes from the apartment. Good heavens—does he think it is poisoned? But no, he reappears with a towel, polishes the neck of the bottle with rigorous application, then hands it back to me with a bow.

My turn. Not to be outdone, I sweep my silk handkerchief out of my outside breast pocket, go through the polishing routine, and over to him. This time his protests are perfunctory. Gulp, and renewed polish and over to me, etc.

Now there starts what I think is to be only a temporary blemish—the train's loudspeaker, playing records. Nearly all the time inside the USSR life is apt to go on to a background of radio sound. The booming voice, the clamorous choir, the sobbing concerto, the stirring male chorus, the violin solo, the man saying OOO-ooo-rah in Red Square, it doesn't matter what, the radio stays on.

I longed to know whether people liked this constant noise, whether they kept it on from habit, or out of respect, or because it was an order. Wherever you go in Russia there's music in the air. Is it a morale-booster? Of course Radio Moscow's news bulletins are the Voice of the Kremlin and ought to be listened to by all. But why all the rest of it?

Anyway, on this train journey the recordings engulfed us and we took them until midnight. They then paused, only to begin again at 7.30 a.m. the next morning, and to keep going mercilessly until we arrived at Baku seven and a half hours later.

Apparently no one protests. No one ever protests in the USSR. If the authorities dish it out, you take it. It is the most outrageous intrusion of privacy. And I tried to tell some of the Soviet people with whom I came in contact that in America this set-up was known as "the captive audience" and had been the subject of legal pitched battles over New York's Grand Central Station and the public streetcars of Washington.

But in the meantime it was no laughing matter to have to endure this endless succession of records. Since we were heading into the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic we got appropriate trimmings. Hour after hour of oriental wailing, off-key melodies full of pipes and cymbals and tambourines and

everyone as miserable as possible. The sort of tune that starts on a flat note, wavers along like extraction night in Baghdad's central dentistry, and winds up with a lament by Ali Baba and all of his forty thieves.

Now and again there would be a patriotic poem—one about the defence of Stalingrad had my vote, because it was such a pleasantly long pause between extractions. It is hot. The sunset bows out and it is night—and back again on the dentist's lament.

The bottle of wine is empty now, and the man in the Party blouse has got out the ladder to climb up into his berth, giving me a grave smile as he starts the ascent. As I lie there sweating in my lower I smile back.

The train keeps stopping. We canter along gently and then the brakes get their grip and the whole thing stops, and there we are, way out somewhere on the borders of Georgia and Azerbaijan, halted in this green-panelled International Coach "proceeding to unlimited destinations". And still the radio howls a last lament.

Before the night is out I know that it was a fearful mistake not to bring DDT. I had planned to, and then somehow it had seemed perhaps unnecessary. But oh no, it wasn't. Next morning I am mottled with bites, but that is one of the things that the censor will not let me report.

Morning—and the radio is going again. And, as happens on trains everywhere in the world, people seem to be possessed with the desire to get up early and tramp down the corridors.

The coach creaks and sways. How many times has it stopped during the night? I look out of the window—and see a woman riding past on a camel. It is a bare, sad landscape through which we are crawling, one of those landscapes which make their way with apparent difficulty to a gentle horizon so far away.

The conductor, a man whose golden teeth glisten and flash in the early sunshine, turns up with a glassful of tea. (The radio is crying its eyes out now.) I ask the conductor whether there is a restaurant car on the train, but he shakes his head in sorrow. Plenty of music but nothing to eat.

Now we are wandering across a vast plain, with nothing much on it. Sunshine and a mass of flat land trudging away to those horizons. You have the feeling that if you were to get out

of the train and get on one of those camels, and then plod over to the horizon, only another horizon far away would await you.

Villages saunter past. Awful villages. Frightening villages. Sheer squalor in the sun. Mud huts with grass tops. Bits of desolation, standing stark in the middle of nowhere. So this is the Soviet dream, Azerbaijan-style?

Fringing the inhabited huts are tumbledown ruins. Frightful, rutted tracks—you can't call them roads. A sense of the forlorn. A cemetery I shan't quickly forget, no railings to it, no boundary, nothing except this collection of tall, slender tomb markers, crazily leaning, made of lengths of rusting old iron.

My friend from the upper berth neatly folds yesterday's *Pravda* for a tablecloth, and spreads it on the little table. Then he produces hard-boiled eggs, slices of bread, and what looks like a piece of lard. (It was bacon—the Russians like it fat.) He bids me to the feast with a gesture—a hospitable return for last night's wine.

I tackle the eggs with grateful relish, eat some bread—but the lard foils me. He urges me on. I slap my stomach and with a wealth of playful pantomime indicate that I am on a diet. He slaps his own ample paunch, but seems to understand and does not insist.

Here's a station. Great animation, and everyone gets off and walks the platform. Portraits of the politburo members line the platform, and there are silver-painted statues of Lenin and Stalin. The stations look poverty-stricken and rough. Indeed the whole of this part of the USSR looks ramshackle and spidery and makeshift. The locomotives and rolling-stock are shoddy. The glimpses of the villages are so sad. What can life be like in these sunny slums? They resemble the Arab villages of North Africa. The women squat outside their pitiful mud huts performing various chores.

At one of the main stops girls are on the platform selling bunches of radishes and big flat loaves looking like junior wagon-wheels. There is a great rush for the radishes, presumably because there is almost nothing else to eat. The girls wear pretty embroidered shawls and flowered dresses. Red soldiers wander around carrying small posies of fresh flowers.

How long would it take to bring this part of the Soviet Union up to the level of Western Europe or America? As regards

roads, housing, sanitation? What a task. A decade? Two? And an outpouring of money on a colossal scale—thousands of millions of pounds. And at the end of that time they would only have caught up to the level that we are at now. By then we should have outstripped them again by many years. This is a "Point Four" area if ever there was one.

We get going again. The land grows more barren-looking. For a time there is some wheat and poppies, but they both peter out. Now the countryside is desolate. Harsh barren mountains. The colour changes, it is yellowish, sandy. Oil derricks appear and come crowding in on us. For the last forty miles or so into Baku they thickly keep us company, sometimes running off into a funnel of the mountains, then charging back again to the borders of the track. And there is black oil sludge on the surface of the ponds.

I have got some copies of the *Daily Express* with me, and I try to use these as a jumping-off place for a conversation. My companion catches sight of a political cartoon by Michael Cummings. He stares at it, at first in disbelief and then with dawning amusement. Finally he stabs at it with his finger and inquires "Molotov?" "Da, da," I say, nodding. He shakes and shakes with laughter for nearly a minute. Then he picks up the paper and goes and shows the cartoon to the people in the compartments on both sides of us. They are panicked by it too. Rarely can even Cummings have scored such a hit.

I have also got an air-mailed edition of the London *Times* and he feels the quality of its special light-weight paper between finger and thumb with grave appreciation. He picks the *Pravda* up from its table-cloth duty and feels that for comparison, then back again to the *Times*. "Good, good," he says in English. At the back of the *Times* is a big photograph of the Pakistanis playing cricket. "Cricket," I say. "National pastime." But he doesn't get the point, for he indicates the pavilion and inquires: "Hangar? For big aeroplane?"

He seems to feel that, as with the eggs for the wine, reciprocation is called for. He holds out *Pravda*, which has a blurred photo of some dignitary making a speech. "Is speaking," he explains. "Is eloquent." "Great stuff," I say. So everyone is happy. In comes the conductor with more tea, made from a

samovar which stands at one end of the corridor. We are all smiles on this train—but the radio is still in full voice.

There are harsh mountains near us now, and through a break in them I get my first glimpse of the Caspian sea, pale and placid, moonstone-like.

At Baku station the Intourist woman awaits me as I swing off the train. She has a much better figure than the majority of Russian women and a graceful walk. She says that she did ballet dancing when she was a child so perhaps that has got something to do with it. But her attractiveness is ruined, so far as I am concerned, by yet more of the gold teeth that one is confronted with in countless mouths in the USSR.

The start of my Baku stay is not encouraging. Back in Moscow I had had that wrangle with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who hadn't wanted to let me come here at all. At the last moment they had relented. (They refused to let me go to Erivan and never did relent. Presumably too close to the Turkish border—although hand-picked groups of foreign visitors, shepherded by the Ministry of Culture, do go there occasionally.) Now Miss Intourist says to me primly as we settle down in the car for the drive to the hotel: "You must realise that all foreign visitors in Baku must keep strictly to a designated area in the centre of the city. Beyond this it is prohibited to pass."

"Oh? Why?"

"Because this is an important industrial centre and a large port. Thus your movements must be restricted."

"What is the designated area?"

"Four blocks in that direction, seven blocks up the hill, five blocks down there, and not more than 200 yards past the hotel along the sea-front."

I laughed. "Looks as though I'm going to be a bit short of exercise," I said. "Are there roadblocks or police patrols to let me know when I have reached the edge of the designated area?"

"No," she said sharply. "You must keep the area in your mind."

"Hmm!" I said. "Did you ever hear that old ranch tune 'Don't Fence Me In'?"

"I am not liking American tunes."

## Was I "Tailed"? Not Quite

ON THE evening of the day after the rupture by the USSR of her diplomatic relations with Australia following the Petrov business, I had dinner with a member of the Australian Embassy in Moscow, and then we went to the American club, on the banks of the river, to have a drink of something other than vodka.

My Australian friend was being "tailed"—and they were really making a job of it. As our taxi drove through the darkness to the club, a big car came tearing along in our wake, alternately dimming and glaring its lights. When we stopped for a traffic light the other car would come up alongside and its occupants, their hats pulled down over their faces, would ostentatiously stare over at us.

As we arrived at the American club, the following car screeched to a halt, and the three men inside jumped out and hurried across the street, pretending to look at the river, although it was a cold night and no time for admiring the view. And of course when we emerged an hour later they were still there—and all set to resume the melodramatic chase.

Before I went to the USSR I was assured that certain things would undoubtedly happen. Among these were (1) that I would be consistently followed; (2) that the Customs examinations would be the most rigorous I had ever known; (3) that within an hour of checking into my room at the Metropole a female voice would be calling up on the telephone to suggest a meeting; (4) that there were dictaphones hidden in all the bedrooms of Moscow's Intourist hotels.

The episode with my Australian acquaintance was the only time that I was followed—and even then they were not following me. I am sure that I was not followed when I moved about alone in any town in the USSR.

That said, I ought to add, that in a country like the USSR it is almost unnecessary to follow anyone. You have the whole population taught from childhood to mistrust the foreigner. I was as obviously a foreigner as if I had been carrying a Union Jack about with me; my clothes, my height, my haircut. Smaller, more subtle things. The way I walked, for example. Very few Russians walk like Englishmen or Americans. We tend to swing along and use our arms. A Russian walks with small neat steps, with little body or arm action. And now and again I would whistle a snatch of tune. I was told that this is something that no Russian ever dreams of doing—it is considered bad manners as well as bad luck.

So you have a tall man, evidently foreign, walking around in some town like Kurgan or Petropavlovsk, where Westerners are about as plentiful as Kazakhs in Leeds. Why bother to follow him? He is under unremitting surveillance the whole time.

The Russian police force is enormous. Its men swarm everywhere. (If they took a few hundred thousand men out of the police, the Border Guards and the MVD they might be able to catch up on that housing problem a bit more briskly.) And the police are extremely alert. You see them peering—always peering—into passing cars, into people's faces, into hotel entrances.

You quickly have the sense of a thoughtful eye nearly always on you, especially at places like airports. If the In-tourist man goes off to attend to someone else for a few minutes, then the porter handling your bags takes over, and is apt to trail along with you wherever you go. The airport 'manager' pops up and sees to it that you are shooed into the VIP waiting-room. If you are sitting waiting for a plane, or strolling around and you glance about you, you will always see someone loitering not far away. If it isn't a policeman in uniform then it's one of those familiar blue suits and a pair of those bright yellow shoes.

At one or two "forbidden cities" when I spent forty minutes or so at an airport in Soviet Central Asia, I was very definitely under close escort, and no bones were made about it. But this was not the same thing as being furtively tailed. And in Kharkov, in the Ukraine, for some reason that I couldn't



fathom, my Intourist guide and I were accompanied everywhere we went during the three days of my stay by a stony-faced young man who was introduced as "the press representative". It was crystal clear what he actually was. But there again, it was open escort.

Official "tailing" of the members of foreign diplomatic missions is applied or lifted by the Soviet authorities as a sort of punishment or reward, depending on current relations with the country concerned.

Thus tailing of the Australians was instantly applied in full rigour as soon as the Petrov affair "broke". Since the death of Stalin the tailing of British Embassy members has been intermittent and not very marked. In the old days its intensity was almost comic. One post-war British Ambassador had two or three thugs always at his elbow. If he went to have a haircut—they would be in the chairs on each side of him. If he went to the ballet or theatre—they would be sitting in the seats just behind him. Once on a country stroll the Ambassador, walking with a French friend, got a few yards ahead of his wife, who was walking with the Frenchman's wife. The MVD boys, taking their job earnestly, slipped between the two couples and tramped solemnly along through the woods, dividing the ambassadorial party into two groups.

But those days are over—for the present at least, and while I was in Moscow Britain rather tended to come in for the friendly treatment. The Russian policemen outside our Embassy were all smiles and salutes. But try going to the American Embassy! There glum, sour looks from the police and a salute given, if at all, with obvious reluctance.

Some observers maintained that it was all part of the Soviet attempt to split Britain and America, but whatever the reason the difference was marked. I even noticed that a suit could cause different treatment. The first time I went to the Foreign Ministry I wore a British double-breasted suit—and got the smiling reception from the MVD men on the doors. Next time I was in an unmistakably American suit, a charcoal-grey job that I bought in Washington—and got the frozen face.

Customs examinations? As already noted, mine were just about the most pleasant I've encountered anywhere in the world.

## JUST BACK FROM RUSSIA

But that again is something new since Malenkov took over. In Stalin's day treatment at the Customs was rigorous indeed—and conducted in a grim atmosphere. Even last January a British businessman on his way home told the Customs that he had a couple of Soviet records with him—whereupon the Customs men with a smiling apology unpacked them and played all four sides through from start to finish on a gramophone they kept right there for the purpose.

The honeyed voice on the hotel telephone? That again is a thing of the past. Once upon a time there were some ladies of poor reputation living at the Metropole. But they have long since been sent packing as part of the Soviet authorities' nationwide—and apparently 100 per cent successful—campaign against prostitution.

Dictaphones in the bedrooms? Well, that is hard to prove or disprove. It seemed to be accepted as a fact by the majority of British visitors, and there was a great deal of finger-to-lips stuff, and knowing glances up at the wall if one started to discuss anything remotely controversial with a British friend in one of the hotel bedrooms. I never bothered. If I felt like saying something critical I said it, and good luck to whoever might have been eavesdropping.

Did I have any first-hand experience that could be described as even remotely sinister? I am not sure. What happened was this. Finding that restrictions on photography had been lifted by the new police edict, I bought a Russian camera just before I set off on my trip to Georgia, Azerbaijan, Central Asia and Siberia.

An American friend told me: "Be sure to keep the films on you at all times. Otherwise you may be in for a bit of a disappointment. Keep them in your pockets."

I had about nine rolls of film and it becomes an awful nuisance to have them bulging your pockets out, and so towards the end of the trip I left them in my hotel bedroom once or twice when I went out.

Back in Moscow I took them to be developed. I looked forward to some interesting shots of the Uzbeks, Siberian street scenes and so forth. When I called to get them the old lady in the developing shop shook her head reproachfully. "You

have been over-exposing very badly," she said. "I fear all your films are blank." And blank they were—jet black from end to end, with not even the little specks of grey from the frames that would be seen at the edges of the film in cases of ordinary over-exposure.

My American friend also shook his head. "I warned you," he said. "Those films have been got at." "What!" I said. "You mean they opened them all up, exposed them, then sealed them again?"

"Lord no. Much simpler. Someone goes to your room at the end of your trip and shoots an X-ray through the films, Click, click. Work of a moment. And they're ruined."

Was that the explanation? Or was it just that I am a thoroughly ham-handed photographer? Could be—but *nine* rolls totally blacked? Also, since I've been back in England I am taking perfectly good pictures with the camera—and still on Russian film.

Now, why should anyone have wanted to wreck my films? I was scrupulously careful not to take anything, such as a bridge in the background of a shot, that could possibly have caused difficulties. These were perfectly legitimate, intrinsically harmless shots of people and things—of everyday life in the USSR.

And that is where the trouble lay. For the Soviet authorities know that a camera inside the USSR is dangerous. That nine out of ten photos taken inside the USSR are not the sort of thing they want to get shown abroad. That the total truth about Russia in pictures as opposed to the selected truth is just as abhorrent to them as the total truth about Russia in words is abhorrent to the censors.

Can you imagine a London bobby threatening to arrest a tourist for taking a picture of him? You are asking for arrest if you take a photo of a Russian policeman, even if all he is doing is directing the traffic. I asked fifteen Soviet policemen if I could take their pictures—and got a mighty short answer each time.

Can you imagine people standing in a British queue threatening a foreigner with manhandling because he took a photo of the queue? That happened in Moscow recently—and an Intourist guide told me about it with pride. "This American

tourist was attempting to take a picture of these poorly dressed people standing in a line. They tried to attack him—and serve him right, do you not agree?”

“No,” I said. “It strikes me as childish behaviour. If you would just stop worrying about what other people think of you and try to behave naturally for a change it would be a great thing.” Maximum umbrage.

The authorities realise that if you start taking photographs inside Russia the results will not bear much relation to the façade which is what the hand-picked Western visitors get shown. The primitiveness, the bad state of much of the country—the squalor even, would not look well in foreign countries.

In Baku I said to my guide, “I would like to get a photograph of those women over there.” “All right,” she said. “But do it discreetly and do not let them know you are a foreigner.” “Why not?” I asked. “Because if they thought that their photographs might perhaps appear in a British newspaper they would be upset.” “But for heaven’s sake, why?” “Ah, you do not understand.”

In the Moscow Central Market a British friend and I got into a heated argument with the Director, an unfriendly man, who was incensed because we had been taking photos without seeking his permission first. Would anybody give a hoot if I started taking pictures in Smithfield or Covent Garden?

On May Day one of the British businessmen had a cine-camera with him in Red Square and shot a considerable footage of the civilian part of the procession, with no one telling him not to. (He was on the opposite side of the Square from the press stand and so missed the row with the MVD.)

He went back to his hotel, put the camera down on a side-table in his suite, and then lunched with friends in the adjoining room of his suite. When he stepped back into the other room after lunch the camera had vanished. The suite had two separate entrances.

He went down and complained to the management. But surely, they said, there must be some mistake. Perhaps the gospodeen had left it somewhere else? When he returned to his suite the camera was back—empty.

What about some other notions widely held about Russians in the West? *That they are held down by a stern police.* I never saw people who answered back more readily to the police, disregarded their orders more often, or got into angrier arguments with them. Quite apart from their tenderness towards drunks, which is a Russian tradition, the police (or "militia" as they are officially called) seemed not brutal or even particularly tough. They make a point of punctilio, and I even saw one salute a small boy who came up to ask him a question in the street.

At one of the night rehearsals for the May Day parade, the column of tanks, rocket-throwers, etc., was about to start moving down Gorki street and the police formed lines to prevent pedestrians crossing in their path. But merrymakers and late homegoers blithely slipped between the police and made off across the road amid madly shrilling whistles and shouting.

*That the Russians are a nation of drunks?*

Folke fit to be of Bacchus' train, so quaffing is their kinde,  
 Drink is their whole desire, the pot is all their pride,  
 The sob'rest head doth once a day stand needful of a guide;  
 If he to banquet bid his friends, he will not shrinke  
 On them at dinner to bestow a dozen kinds of drinke;  
 Such liquor as they have, and as the country gives;  
 But chiefly two, one called Kwas, whereby the Mousike lives,  
 Small ware and water-like, but somewhat tart in taste.  
 The rest is mead of honey made, wherewith their lips they  
     baste,  
 And if he goe unto his neighbour as a guest,  
 He cares for little meat, if so his drinke be of the best.

So wrote Master George Turberville, secretary at the English Embassy in Moscow in 1568.

There is a great deal of drunkenness to be seen in Russia 1954. I got the impression that many Russians have not only not got good heads, but also that they drink for the express purpose of getting drunk.

If that is the case then their missions are certainly completed. For if you kick off with 300 grammes of vodka (a fairly large

carafe) and then put on top of it in quick succession four or five bottles of beer as I constantly saw being done, you are asking for results and can be pretty sure of getting them.

It is also a perfectly normal thing to see people drinking vodka, brandy or wine for breakfast. Having got into the groove early they are liable to stay that way all day.

But it is depressing and sordid to see a naval officer in a restaurant lying asleep with his face on the table (this face-on-the-table business seems to be the recognised way of quietly passing out). Or a youth falling off his chair onto the floor with such violence that he cuts his head open. Or three friends lying, out to the world, on the kerb of one of Moscow's main streets in broad daylight (admittedly, this was in Easter week, but all the same . . .). Drunks lying in the mud in Zagorsk and in the dust in Siberia. A staggeringly drunken soldier being gently eased out of sight in the main waiting room of Kharkov airport at 10 in the morning.

The Russian attitude towards public drunkenness reminded me of the Hindus and their sacred cows. Both the cows and the drunks are intolerable nuisances and ought to be kept off the public thoroughfares. Instead both the cows and the drunks are treated with solicitude, affection even, and allowed to go on gumming up the works.

For a long time the Soviet press ignored the subject of alcoholism, but in the past year there have been many references to it—and especially the problem of drinking by juveniles. The Soviets have borrowed the English word hooligan and there are frequent denunciations of hooliganism—or, since the Russians do not have an aitch sound in their language, "gooliganism."

I wonder if the Soviets could ever manage to conquer drink? That I would give a lot to see. They have, and let's give them every credit for this, done away with prostitution, no mean triumph. But they have signally failed to convince their people that tipping is the insult to the dignity of the progressive socialist individual that their dogma says it is.

*That the "typical Russian" is an exuberant, roystering fellow, loud-voiced, hearty and quick to show emotion.*

Except for a certain amount of quiet weeping at the theatre and ballet—at one ballet down in the Caucasus there was

hardly a dry eye in the house—and one semi-hysterical Moscow street scene I witnessed, I would say that the dominant trait of the modern Soviet citizen is restraint.

Down in Georgia the people showed exuberance and liveliness. But elsewhere I was constantly struck by the lack of cheerful conversation or noisy laughter.

A public restaurant inside the Soviet Union—unless the band is having its ear-splitting way—is apt to be a place of low tones, or even murmuring. Compared with, say, a typical restaurant in France, it is like a funeral parlour.

Even the street dancing I saw as night fell on May Day was by British standards very restrained and sedate. In fact you could say that the crowds were very well behaved, but I couldn't make out whether they were enjoying themselves or not. An enormous picture of Stalin and Lenin hung high in the air (it was suspended from a captive balloon and dramatically spotlighted) and fireworks popped off over Red Square. Vast throngs were out and about, but I did not get the sense of gaiety or effervescence that I would expect in such circumstances in Western Europe.

Even in drink, the Russians I saw did not seem to get up much head of steam. There was some drunken singing from a booth in an open-air restaurant down in Kiev, but it seemed that the stage of total paralysis is reached so quickly by most Russian drinkers that there is not much time for high jinks en route.

Soviet men and women struck me as earnest and serious, especially the women. They frown on frivolity and are puzzled by jests.

I have rarely in my travels visited a land where sex is so completely de-emphasised. The women seem to dress as unexcitingly as they possibly can. Their gowns are loosefitting and cut like sacks. So are their bathing suits. A young man once asked me about the "scandalous way in which women of Britain and America reveal their shoulders and bosoms when they wear evening dress." Were they not ashamed to appear in public looking like loose women?

There is nothing remotely resembling a pin-up in the Soviet Union and no sexy magazines are on sale. If girdles and

corsets are available it seems that very few Soviet women trouble to buy them. From observation of the shops I can report that soviet women wear elastic-ended bloomers and have suspender belts which button down the front.

To say that Soviet women are not at all coquettish is to state a profound truth. Even young women have severe expressions. It is partly of course due to the fact that women do all the same tasks as men, make the same wages, and mix with them freely in competition. If you see women sweeping the streets, laying bricks, or driving a steam-roller, bundled up in shapeless clothing you are apt to develop a different sort of approach.

When I first went to Russia I automatically offered women the same sort of small courtesies that I would in the west—standing aside to let them go first through a door and so forth. All I got for my pains was a sharp and suspicious glance and certainly no thanks.

The “comradely” approach which is the basis of the Soviet idea has certainly modified relationships between the sexes. I only once saw a young man kissing his girl in public, and that was about one in the morning on a seat in Moscow’s Gorki Park (but I am bound to admit that there was nothing half-hearted about the kiss).

Towards the end of my stay I was discussing this question with a young Russian, and gave it as my opinion that Soviet women are extraordinarily straight-laced and puritanical. “So, you are having this impression?” “Decidedly.” “I think you are perhaps being wrong.” “Why?” He paused and reflected and grinned. “Now then, the Soviet Union produces much wine of various types; excellent wine. Have you ever known a country which is a big wine-producer and whose women are being as straight-laced as you say?”

The only direct proof I have that even in the puritanical Soviet Union there may be occasional back-sliding, came on a Moscow side street. A street hawker was surrounded by a giggling, whispering group of men and women. And for the equivalent of a pound he was selling little glass figurines of startling coarseness. If he had tried it in London he would automatically have got a couple of months in jail without the option.



## CHAPTER XVI

# The Men Who "Go Over"

HAVING had a longish glimpse of life behind the Iron Curtain, I find myself wondering with renewed curiosity how Maclean and Burgess are making out. For Maclean especially, the cultured, brilliant man with a talent for friendship, the start of his fourth year of exile this year must have brought a sense of near desperation.

I think it likely that the flight of Mrs. Melinda Maclean and the children to join Donald Maclean was undertaken in the knowledge that he was getting near breaking point, and that only reunion with his family could boost his morale sufficiently to enable him to go on.

Life must be a sombre affair for Maclean and Burgess. The law of diminishing returns must have operated quickly in their usefulness to the Soviet authorities, and whatever that usefulness originally amounted to it must long ago have been spent.

The Soviets do not greatly trouble to conceal their feelings about western defectors. The defectors are treated with a thinly veiled condescension bordering on contempt. It is made plain to them in a hundred ways that they are there only on sufferance. Perhaps the very important ones, men like Pontecorvo, with aptitudes and scientific knowledge at their disposal, fare better. But for the small or middling fry it cannot be very cheerful.

One such defector is Archibald Johnstone, who lives in Moscow with his Russian wife, and whom I encountered on several occasions. He was formerly the editor of *British Ally*, the official magazine which we started in the honeymoon period at the end of the war, but which was finally forced to cease publication.

Johnstone chose freedom, Soviet-style, tore up his British

passport and settled down to life in Moscow. He makes a fairly good living doing translation work and writing propaganda articles for such magazines as "*News, A Soviet Review of World Events.*" One such article he did while I was there, headed "A Letter to a Scottish Mother", was addressed to Mrs. Condron whose son, Royal Marine Andrew Condron of Bathgate, refused to return to Britain with other POW's when the Korean fighting ended.

It ended "Andrew is in a class by himself, a shining example to all of us. We'll a' be prood o' Andy!" In a way, of course, Archie himself is a shining example too.

I'd give a lot to be able to know what really goes on in the mind of Archibald Johnstone. He doesn't look awfully happy, but maybe appearances are deceptive. The first time I met him was at a typical reception given by the Ministry of Culture in honour of some visitors belonging to the Scottish-Soviet Friendship Association. It would be interesting to know how many thousands of roubles yearly the Soviet Government, through the Minister of Culture, spends on these junkets.

The National Hotel and the Sovietskaya nearly always house several visiting foreign "delegations" who are on a free-loading spree at the expense of the USSR—North Koreans, Chinese, Indians, Burmese, coal black Sudanese, Canadians, Australians, British, East Germans, Hungarians, Bulgarians, anyone welcome. They are trotted round the sights, put up at the best hotels, sent on a junket to the Crimea or the Caucasus where the climate is nice and the accommodation as good as anywhere in the country, and so home.

A typical group from the West probably has one or two open Communists in it, some fellow travellers, and—important from the Soviet point of view—some men or women with "open minds". They are the important ones.

The Ministry of Culture soirée for the visiting Scots, two of whom wore the kilt, got under way with a concert lasting an hour and a half. We sat on rows of little chairs and took it. One man played Lizt's Hungarian Rhapsody on the balalaika. That way it somehow sounds even longer than on the piano.

A baritone with the voice of a bull practically tore the roof off. He must have thought he was in the Albert Hall, instead

of a smallish reception room. I was in the front row, what's more.

Then a rather roguish, decadent-looking man, with hair flopping over his forehead and wearing a blue bow tie with white spots, sat down at the piano and accompanied a haggard blonde in a really deplorable black evening dress as she sang what were billed as "three Scottish folk songs" in Russian. You could have sworn that they were Russian folk songs, very melancholy and intense. There was also a violin-and-piano job, a Chopin nocturne and all sorts of other items. Towards the end I got the impression that the audience was trying to keep its applause sufficiently warm to be polite but of not enough volume to encourage an encore. I know I was.

It was nearly 10 p.m. when the last item ended, and then it was time for food and drink. The buffet was lavish and of excellent quality—everything from caviar to salmon and vodka to champagne. The toasts followed the expected pattern—"friendship" "peace" "brotherly greetings" "peace" "admiration for the USSR" "peace". . . .

Rather unexpectedly a dance band then made its appearance and whoopee of a sedate nature ensued. I hoped that we might perhaps have a Scots reel or even a sword dance from one of the kilted guests, but no. . . .

Rumours have persistently pinpointed Maclean and Burgess at or just outside Prague. Men who have recently been there tell me that Prague, once a cheery, bustling town, is now sunk in gloom. Superficially it imitates Moscow, just as does East Berlin, with the potted-palm-and-plush routine. But whereas in Moscow one at least has the sense of a place where policy is being made and where great power resides, in the satellite capitals there is nothing but a lack-lustre imitation.

What is the existence of Maclean and Burgess nowadays? No doubt their masters give them the good life so far as it is attainable; luxury flats, perhaps a *dacha* out in the country; a chauffeur-driven Zis or a Czech model; priority on theatre and opera tickets, and the rest of it. Probably they are well paid too. But I wonder if all this is enough?

Do they ever get asked to a Ministry junket? Do they relax smilingly over the vodka and Soviet champagne, the caviar

and the toasts? Sit listening to a concert for an hour and a half?

And when American Melinda Maclean's chic western clothes finally wear out, will she be content with the offerings of the Soviet dressmakers?

*British Ally* magazine may or may not have had much effect on the Russians—but the Russians certainly had their effect on the staff of *British Ally*. Not only did Editor Johnsonsone defect, but so did the assistant editor Robert Dagleish. He resigned in 1919 and has lived in Moscow since.

While I was there he married Ina Gregorievna Nogtich, who was formerly a switchboard operator at the British Embassy. Unlike Johnstone, Dagleish had retained his British passport and he formally applied to be married at the Embassy, as was his right as a British subject. The Ambassador normally performs these ceremonies, but Sir William Hayter, not altogether surprisingly, delegated this particular duty to another official.

Later I inquired how things had gone. Said the official with a straight face: "There was no reception afterwards."

## Song-and-Dance Show

I WAS prepared for the encroachment of Soviet-style architecture in the remoter republics of the USSR. The pillared temples of the new order, Lenin-Stalin Centres, Palaces of Culture and all the rest, which rear up from among the ancient oriental buildings, although incongruous, are somehow expectable. The sculpture too, in the shape of thousands of silver-covered statues of Lenin and Stalin, tend to become part of the landscape, although now and again the Stalin features, peeping past some tree or bush in a park, come as a slight surprise.

But what took me aback was to find that the Uzbeks, a genial, friendly lot, who seem to enjoy life and have a sense of humour, have incorporated the Soviet doctrine, in its most literal form into their folk lore.

One night in Tashkent I went to an Uzbek song-and-dance show. It was in an open-air auditorium, one of the many new buildings which have gone up in the native city. The place was jammed, mostly a male audience, and almost all of them wearing the grey and black Uzbek skullcap. Unlike the people of Russia, who tend to take their pleasures with a restraint bordering on sorrow, this crowd was full of exuberance, and scarcely a turn was allowed to take place without a hurricane of shouted comments, loud laughter and occasional wolf calls.

The women wore native dress for the dances but unfortunately donned western-style evening gowns for the songs. Uzbek women are portly and ill-favoured, by western standards. Their harsh, almost grotesque faces, are not improved by the inescapable gold teeth which glint like jewelled morse signals in the footlights. When they stick to their own native dress they get away with it. That style of dancing is not for me—the moving of the staring-eyed head from side to side, while the

shoulders remain motionless; the tiny gestures of the hand, like conjurors limbering up for the party; or the whirling about with pigtailed flying at right-angles from the heads, while the four-piece band uncovers a cauldron of boiling, peculiar noises.

But all the same, the dancing is acceptable. The golden pantaloons, the emerald-green jackets, the silver caps covered in jewels, have an exotic appropriateness. The mad band which manages to sound like a musical saw on a lost week-end, goes very well with the whirling. And if you must have a fat woman in pantaloons, this is undoubtedly where she looks her best.

Not so the singing. For some reason it is thought right to put on terrible travesties of western evening dress. On stage comes marching a female welter-weight draped in a piece of blue or scarlet plush, which looks as if it had been torn down from the curtain rods just ten seconds before the performer made her entry.

But the songs caused almost constant uproar from the audience. The enjoyment sounded so infectious that I got my Russian-speaking guide to ask a nearby Uzbek what was being sung—and what were the comments. Back down the line through the two interpreters I got this running commentary:

"I love you, light of my life, but because of the notable weakness in my legs I am unable to follow you as fast as I could wish." (Uproar from the audience.) What are they saying? "What this pretty girl do with silly man who having weak legs?"

"The little cotton-picker who has visited the Kremlin and who there gained her glorious prize, returning with it to Uzbekistan, determined to pick even more greatly in future." You mean that was the title of the song? "Yes, is being title. You wish translation verses?" No, the title gives the idea.

"You are like best fruit, dearest, but no fruit is as juicy and tender as you. Also, I would die for you." You mean that is all in the title—the part about the fruit, and also the part about dying? "Is correctly, absolutely in title." (Renewed uproar in the auditorium.) What are they shouting? "Agree best fruit, but not to die."

A very long, sad whining song, with the singer giving it

everything she has, listened to in relative silence. "The epic building of the great Turkmenian Canal."

Another of the same type, but this time arousing some enthusiasm. "Long live the great collective farms of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Uzbekistan."

"I wish urgently to meet you, O adored one, but there are, alas, other appointments." . . . "The 'norm' is exceeded in the cotton plantations, to the indescribable joy of all." . . . "Oh, great Stalin, our feet were upon the incorrect road, but you have shown us where is the correct one." . . . "I am loving my tractor as if it is being my sweetheart." Tremendous uproar. How now? "Joking fellows are saying they are preferring their sweethearts, but they are simply joking."

"Why I feel sick, why I continually fainting? It must be because I am loving you." "Greetings on the completion of the great new paper factory, which pleases all."

The interruptions reached their climax when a girl, better favoured than the others, appeared and gave us a song which not only aroused the audience to fever-pitch but had them joining in on the more sustained top notes. What was that about? I asked. "Just so. She is singing that she is sad because her lover has gone on long journey and now she is being always lonely and totally without boy friend." And what are the audience saying? "Well, in view of the plight of the comrade singer, the audience is seeing fit to make certain interesting suggestions."

It was an odd experience to listen to these dirges, full of sorrow and minor keys, and a banging of drums and fruity notes on what sounded like a misanthropic oboe, only to discover when it was all over that the whole thing had been in praise of the next Five-Year Plan.

Then it was the turn of the men. The male dancers looked very raffish, with their painted faces, knowing glances and feverish shimmies. But the male singers were as staid as could be, all of them decked out in ill-fitting tail coats and white ties, and advancing to the footlights with immense portentousness as the bats fluttered and darted overhead.

In charge of the whole offering was a big woman in a white satin dress. She had a rather handsome face and a most

formidable manner. Whenever the interruptions and ribald comment threatened to get out of hand she would sweep on stage and quell the rowdies with the dynamic air of a hardened toastmaster calling for silence for the last speech at the end of a long and bibulous banquet.

In the intervals everyone trooped out animatedly and rushed the windows where ice cream was on sale. It was a warm, lazy evening, and the trees had a metallic shine to them under the lights. The Uzbeks milled around in their skullcaps, laughing and talking. Next door was the Park of Culture and Rest, full of scarlet banners and huge portraits of Voroshilov and Kaganovitch and Mikoyan. And of course those statues, statues of Lenin and Stalin, standing there among the trees. And at the sides of the gravel walks were big charts and graphs and pictures, showing what was planned in the next five years. So much more of this and that and that. But for the Uzbeks especially more cotton, for that is their speciality. And the bands played on the open-air concert platforms, and there was music through the usual master loudspeaker, and youths in European style-suits played billiards, canary-coloured balls on an ink-blue cloth.

And it was time to go back for the second half of this three-and-a-half-hour show, with more of the songs about the glories of the Soviet, interspersed with love. And lying there at the entrance to the Park of Culture and Rest was a drunk, sprawled out across the path, and the white-tunicked policeman pleading with him to please get up and go home. But the drunk was past hearing or caring. Mikoyan stared down on him with a hint of sorrow, I thought.

And although tonight there is still a lot of the native city left, and this auditorium and the park look like interlopers among the mudhuts, in another year or so, as my guide reminds me, it will all be sovietised and no native city will be left.

Progressive principles are sweeping away the relics of Uzbek tradition. More ill-fitting dress suits, more plush evening gowns. And more songs about the building of paper factories and canals to come.



PART TWO

FAR BEYOND  
MOSCOW

## CHAPTER XVIII

# The Iceberg You Don't See

BECAUSE the Soviet authorities are so anxious to show only their national shop window, and to keep visitors away from the drearier side of Russian life, I naturally sought a look behind the scenes.

There is a lot in the USSR that is not attractive—but in the effort to see the bad as well as the good, I tried to keep a sense of proportion. If you go looking for the sleazy side of things you can always find it in any country.

Our own slums are still pretty frightful, and many sections of our big towns that don't technically qualify as slums are nonetheless depressingly drab deserts of bricks and mortar.

The glittering United States has got a lot to be rueful about in the way of slums and wretched living conditions. So have most countries. But whereas Britain, the USA and the rest of us freely admit our shortcomings and, as far as I know, wouldn't dream of trying to keep foreigners away from having a look at them, it is the pose of the USSR that such things do not exist there.

Of course they do, and the living conditions of many Russians are frightful. It seems a waste of time to deny it or to try to cover it up. If the Soviet authorities were to say frankly: "This is bad, but we hope to improve matters in time", they could probably get plenty of goodwill from people like me. But no. Nothing is ever bad, according to the Soviet authorities.

I have seen some disastrous sweat shops in the USSR. Underground congested workshops where men and women worked elbow to elbow, under naked electric light bulbs, peering away at their sewing machines—the electric lights necessary, although outside and above ground in the streets

it was a bright sunny day. Those sort of conditions existed in London and New York about fifty years ago.

I have gone off on my own and inspected tenement blocks in Moscow and Leningrad and Bilisi—dirty, dark, forbidding entrances and mouldy, cracked stairways; cluttered, muddy courtyards; battered scruffy doors to the flats; and, when I knocked or rang on some pretext, glimpses of crowded, dingy interiors.

Here is the Russia that the run-of-the-mill visitor gets shown: he is put up at the National Hotel, Moscow's most attractive, where he is treated very well by a pleasant staff, most of whom can speak some English, French or German. During his brief stay in the capital he eats fairly well and is taken on the stock tours—the treasures of the Kremlin Museum, the new Moscow University, a show-place kindergarten, a couple of art galleries and every night—if he likes—to the admirable theatre and the matchless ballets. He sees the centre of Moscow, with the impressive new streets, the mass of new cars, and the brooding but aesthetically attractive Kremlin. At the end of his ten days or so he probably goes home thinking: Not so bad.

He has seen about as much as you see of an iceberg above the water-line.

Even in Moscow, if the visitor cares to explore for himself, he may easily get surprises.

On my swing to the south and west I planned to visit a spot called Petropavlovsk, on the northern border of Kazakhstan, and on the Trans-Siberian railway. I knew it to be a reception centre for the workers arriving to help in the Virgin Lands project. And something told me that it might be an educational experience to go there.

Petropavlovsk was not too easy to get at. When I first applied to Intourist, Moscow, to go, I was told that it was impossible because there was no airfield. I persisted, but again Intourist said there was no airfield. Would I kindly suggest something else?

I dropped into the Intourist office in the Metropole Hotel, the staff of which is not noted for its sunny qualities, and sat down at the desk of a disagreeable blonde woman who was in charge of the arrangements for my trip.

"Well, and where do you wish to go instead of Petropavlovsk?" she inquired bleakly. "I still wish to go there," I said. She glared at me. "How many times do we have to tell you that there is no airfield there?" "But I understand that there is one," I replied.

She muttered something about making further inquiries. Two days later I was told that I could indeed fly to Petropavlovsk, but I was to understand that I could only travel "rough" in a cargo plane. I said that was all right.

After another few days I was told that a high official of Intourist would like to see me. At our get-together he shook his head over the Petropavlovsk idea and said that it presented "certain difficulties".

Such as what? "Well, the trouble is that you plan to fly north from Alma Ata to Petropavlovsk. But to do this you will have to come down in Karaganda."

"And so?"

"Karaganda is strictly closed to foreign tourists."

I had heard something about Karaganda, a hush-hush key industrial centre, run entirely by the MVD.

"But if I stay at the airport and do not go into the town, wouldn't that be all right?"

"It is difficult. The facilities at the airport are poor. You would be most uncomfortable. I do not believe you could get a meal. Certainly not a bed."

"Well, I've already agreed to travel by baggage plane, so I don't mind spending a few hours on a bench if necessary."

"You will be highly uncomfortable, I warn you."

"Look, if you say I can't go, that's that. I shall cut out the last leg of the trip. But if you are only worried about my comfort, forget it."

There was a pause. "Very well, if you are sure you don't mind the discomforts, we shall obtain permission for you to land in Karaganda."

"Thanks very much."

Now I was in Alma Ata, with a woman guide who had flown out specially from Moscow to translate for me on the last part of my trip. She was a cheerful, bustling, chain-

smoking little thing who had been through the siege of her native city, Leningrad.

"Well, tomorrow we are off to Petropavlovsk," I said. "I understand that we travel by baggage plane and spend most of the night in Karaganda."

"So? I make inquiries."

After an hour she was back. "I do not know where you are having this story about a baggage plane. There is a perfectly normal passenger service from here to Petropavlovsk. Our seats are confirmed."

"Oh? Well, that's fine."

"And also you are having incorrect information about the time of our departure. We leave not in the afternoon but soon after breakfast. We reach Petropavlovsk in the evening."

"Then there must have been a switch in the schedule. Here is the timetable the Intourist people gave me in Moscow. It shows a stop of several hours during the night in Karaganda."

"There has been a change. We now spend only forty minutes in Karaganda."

"Rather a sudden change?"

"Perhaps the summer schedules are now in force."

The next day we were off bright and early. The hotel manager, the chap who had lived there fifteen years and did not know how far away the Chinese border was, nor even what the huge range of snowy mountains was called, was there to see us off in his soiled pink, rayon, short-sleeved vest and nondescript trousers, his gentle voice and grey hair brushed back and bags under his eyes.

A policewoman was walking past the hotel as we drove away, a big gun at her belt. She looked trim and efficient in her white tunic and tight belt and dark blue skirt. Her face was Mongolian.

The roads are dismal in and around Alma Ata, and after going several miles towards the airport, our driver gets into an argument with a mean-faced policeman about whether a road is up or not and has to come all the way back to town and start again by a different route.

Alma Ata airport guarded by armed men, and the gate is

opened for our taxi by a tough wearing a six-shooter. Some Kazakh women working in the blazing sun on the new airport building. Looks as if it will take them quite a time yet.

Are they going to charge me excess weight on my baggage? It's a toss-up. When I left Moscow I was told that by rights I ought to pay the equivalent of £7 for excess. I protested so they said never mind. At some places they don't even bother to weigh it, let alone charge you. At others they do both. Here they don't bother.

These back-of-beyond airfields are primitive, just dusty fields and talk of "tarmac next year". I suppose one reason why they are under armed guard is that most of them seem to be military as well as civil airfields. At nearly all of them you see a squadron or two of fighter planes drawn up at the side. They range all the way from old biplanes to brand new silver-coloured swept-wing jets—like the ones they had in the May Day parade.

We get into our plane and wait for the "go" sign. It's a woman who gives it, a Kazakh, with impassive Mongolian face. She stands out in the blazing sun, on a rough T-shaped arrangement of canvas set on the earth and held down against the wind by a couple of bricks.

She holds a red flag in one hand and a white in the other, and finally she plunges down the white one to send us away. I couldn't see what determined her decision. Certainly there is little traffic at these airfields and the risk of collision is about zero.

We hop off in a minor dust storm kicked up by our propellers. Up, and there underneath is Alma Ata looking rather attractive among all its trees and outlying orchards. A great oasis in this burned land. Off on the right the screen of mountains.

As soon as we are clear of the town Kazakhstan settles into wilderness and that is the way it stays for most of the day. We plug northwards, almost due north, for nearly a thousand miles, and eight hours of travel.

A great bare desert land, over which the shadows of the clouds drift like basking whales. The gleam of Lake Balhach, and then the town, cowering under its huge pall of smoke, the

town of "simple fishermen". The town that is a junior Pittsburg springing up out of this Asiatic desert. Half an hour at the airport. The airfield is hacked out of the desert and has vast horizons. I realise I am under surveillance. One of the blue suits which is sitting just behind me in the plane keeps just behind me everywhere I go. For laughs I pretend that I am going to get back into the plane instead of having a meal in the airport restaurant and watch his face fall when he thinks he has got to skip his meal too.

Primitive petrol pump contained in a sort of upright wooden box, like an upended coffin. Nearby a twin coffin for the fire-fighting equipment. Loudspeakers piping music all over the field—to make it seem less forlorn, I suppose. Very hot strong wind blowing. I suddenly dart off the path and stoop to pick a flower. That worries blue suit no end. Have a heart, MacColl.

These are primitive little airport buildings which might have been rushed to completion half an hour earlier, by the look of them. And the dwarf's garden, with its few bushes and trees, wilting in the sun and the hot wind, looks like something stuck down as background in a B picture.

Into the restaurant. Any wine? Only port. Hardly in this weather. Vodka and smoked cheese. Blue suit is at the next table toying with a bottle of mineral water. I start shooting glances over his shoulder. Of course he starts looking back furtively to see what in the world I am looking at. Nothing much there, but he doesn't like it. Oh, quit teasing, MacColl.

My lady guide sees the by-play and chain-smokes more chainily than ever. She explains that it was the siege of Leningrad that turned her hair prematurely grey. She produces a rather nice phrase; talking of a famous Russian prince of the old days, she explains: "He owned one of the biggest landscapes in the country."

Time to take off. Blue suit doggedly follows me back in the plane. The loudspeakers are still churning out music. Another hour or so—and here's Karaganda.

First time I ever saw a concentration camp. We get a good view as the plane comes in. Rows and rows of small neat huts, surrounded by high barbed wire and high towers with inward-pointing machine-guns at the corners. No signs of life there.

Presumably everyone is out at work somewhere. No knowing who the inhabitants are either. Could be POWs still. Not necessarily though.

This Karaganda is a tremendous place. It seems to be four separate towns, or perhaps three big suburbs spreading out from the original core. Maybe two hundred or more high slag heaps, some of them smouldering. A very big works, could be a smelting works, quite near the airfield. Pipe-lines and towers and factories. And, neat and simple as an elementary exercise in geometry, these rows of huts where people live the simple life. So white and clean-looking from the air. No gardens. Nothing like that. Only the factories and the slag heaps round them and a great deal of stagnant water, and all those little towers and pipe-lines and impedimenta. And rolling off into the far distance a railway line, taking whatever it is that Karaganda produces to wherever it will do the most good.

The MVD is looked on abroad as entirely a police and security force. Its tremendous part in the industrialisation and war industries drive of the USSR is little known. But it has built, transformed and taken over whole towns and industries in some of the areas most vital to the Soviet war potential.

In the Urals, and here in the heart of Soviet Asia, the MVD is in charge. Since the last war the Urals have become one of the most bristling industrial areas not only inside the USSR but in the world. Great arsenals and factories turning out everything from tanks to planes to artillery to rocket-throwers are ensconced in the manufacturing "fortress" of the Ural Mountains. And this is strictly MVD territory.

Here in Karaganda is MVD territory too. This giant coal-mining region is of first-rate importance to the Soviet war industries. Its output is estimated to have been stepped up by as much as two hundred times compared with Tsarist days. The workers? Convicts, DPs—what has happened to the people of the erstwhile German Republic of the Volga?—and German POWs.

Down the spindly ramp into the hot windy airport. This place is the personal property of the MVD. They run it, lock,



stock and barrel. No loudspeakers playing anything here. Well, that's one up to the MVD.

Several MVD men form a reception committee, some in uniform, some not. Polite chap quickly shepherds me towards the airport restaurant. Blue suit walks off somewhere and I never see him again. Mission accomplished.

The airport restaurant contains a big rubber plant in a pot, and one of the roughest, toughest bunches I have seen—even in Russia. Looks as if you could strike a match on any jowl in sight. And they wouldn't notice it, either. However, the waitress is unexpectedly pleasant, brisk and cheerful. She brings fried eggs and wine. We are the subject of covert glances through the plumage of the rubber plant. Every so often a uniformed MVD man walks in and has a good hard look around. Not at me especially—just everyone in sight. Turns out that my guide is very fond of soup. So that explains why she is always asking me if I want any. I never do—weather much too hot. She always looks crestfallen, when I say no, but now at last the truth is out; she admits her own partiality and falls to. Borsch in Karaganda. Borsch à la MVD.

Our fellow-lunchers really look a bunch of thugs. Shaven heads. Grim, big-boned faces. Sudden thought: they do not look as if they are going anywhere, or have come from anywhere. They look as if they belonged here, if that is the word.

Further speculation cut off by announcement of departure. Same polite young man doubles back down the path with me. Up and away, with the barbed wire and the machine-guns in the sunshine, and the rows and rows of so neat little huts swinging over at an angle. . . .

It was indeed an education to visit Petropavlovsk. It was not enjoyable at the time, and there were few inducements to stay. But I decided to stay there not one night but two, to savour the place properly. I thought that it might not only do me good, but my Intourist guide as well.

An encyclopaedia, published in 1912, gives it three lines: "Petropavlovsk. Town, Asiatic Russia, Gov. of Akmolinsk, on the Siberian Rly. 175 miles w. of Omsk. It has a considerable trade with Bokhara. Pop. 20,000."

## JUST BACK FROM RUSSIA

Nowadays the locals will tell you the population has quadrupled and is 80,000. Early on in my visit to the USSR I grew wary of these figures that get tossed around. Any really accurate statistic, of the sort that would be readily available in a western country, is regarded as a military secret. And no census has been held in Russia since before the war.

But let's accept 80,000 as a correct figure. These 80,000 don't really have much to congratulate themselves on.

Although Petropavlovsk is not an unimportant station on the trans-Siberian railway, the town is a ruinous, mouldering nightmare of a place. An offensive smell pervades it. Its unpainted wooden chalets, their ornamental cornices a mockery of the squalor all about, are tumbledown and dirty. Side-streets are rough, rutted morasses with the carcasses of long-dead animals rotting here and there, and a few hens picking over the desolation.

On our way into town from the airfield we go past the most dismal hovels, ramshackle and sad. It was a shantytown of the most unappetising kind—battered bits of wood and corrugated iron and oddments. Some of the low-slung huts seemed to be constructed of peat or turf.

On one side of the main street runs an open ditch (this town of 80,000 has no sanitation). The grim-faced inhabitants trail along the pavements.

Here is the hotel, a modest front, crumbling a bit at the base, and a high narrow stairway up to the first floor. I make my way with some difficulty along the bare wooden planks of the corridor to my room, as there is a line of brass beds set up in the corridor itself, with men already asleep on them still wearing their day clothes. Down at the end of the corridor a large bust of Stalin surveys the scene from behind a palm tree.

Let's say that the sanitary arrangements are highly unpleasant.

I get the best room, of which the main feature is another big potted palm. I fight my way past its spreading branches and find myself with two beds, their pillows teed up under netting doilies, as is the fashion. The walls are painted a brilliant sea blue and in the corner there is a ceiling-high

stove. Artificial flowers are in a tall thin vase. The manageress hurries in with a big pot of tea.

What would happen if you gave the inhabitants of a place like this a free vote on which they would rather spend millions of roubles on—a great new football stadium or a modern system of sanitation? The betting is that when the authorities finally get around to Petropavlovsk it will be the stadium. But what would the people prefer? Anyway, they are not likely to be consulted. For myself I prefer bread and lavatories to bread and circuses—but Petropavlovsk has the circus.

If an anti-Communist Hollywood film director were to dream up the worst Russian set he could think of, I don't think he could outdo the reality of Petropavlovsk. The mud and filth, the condition of the roads and sidewalks, the fleet of chalets sinking into the bog, assuming distorted shapes as they slowly go down, the corpses of the animals in the side-roads—side-roads that give the appearance of having been shelled.

The market, where the depressed-looking inhabitants paw over a collection of junk which you marvel can find buyers—ancient motor tyres, that look about twentieth-hand; gramophone records of equal antiquity, bags of rusty nails. The railway station (the rail tracks go through the middle of the town and are not fenced off) with the special waiting-rooms for the workers arriving for the Virgin Lands project. The workers look in poor shape after their journeys, some of them immensely long, many days and nights in "hard" carriages. They are unshaven and sweaty and filthy, hollow-eyed and glum. Their belongings are in cheap fibre suitcases. They make shift to wash as best they can. The toilet facilities at the station are unspeakable.<sup>1</sup> A bath? Then I shall have to go

<sup>1</sup> This is a depressing feature of life in much of the Soviet Union today. As soon as you get away from the bigger cities sanitation becomes crude. And even in the big cities it is often far from impeccable. I got by because I had with me two pocket benzedrine inhalers which I brought with me from Britain. I would stuff an inhaler into each nostril before facing the recurrent ordeal—in Tashkent an Uzbek got a great shock on encountering me in the hotel corridor thus accoutred.

However, in these matters the Anglo-Saxons are perhaps over fastidious. In many parts of the Continent and in the Balkans sanitation is none too sparkling. The Soviet peoples are a rough and ready bunch and they apparently think nothing of it. It's a question of what one is used to.

to the town's communal bath-house. I set off, carrying my sponge-bag, to walk the several blocks. People look at me with curiosity as I make my way down the dreary streets. What a lot one takes for granted in the West. Here even a moderately well-paved street would be a wonderful luxury. And just one garden, of the kind you casually glimpse a thousand of from any train-window in Britain would in this sombre place become a vision of delight.

The old women in charge of the bath-house, warned of my approaching advent, have done their best to get it into good condition, but it's a tough task. The cracked floor of the room where I take my hot shower from a rusty old pipe and sprinkler seems to have some sort of slime on it. But the water is piping hot.

Dinner is a bit of an ordeal. The little restaurant is packed, as are all Russian restaurants everywhere, and the percentage of diners who have been trying to dim the outlines of life with vodka is, perhaps not surprisingly, large. My appetite receives a setback when a youth at the next table, wearing a cap and with his trousers tucked into high boots, is violently ill.

No attempt is made to clear up the mess, and the youth resumes his interrupted meal with zest. Later, as the Intourist woman and I tackle a salad consisting of sour cream on spring onions, and a steak, a fight breaks out in the corner. This runs down finally of its own accord. Now I notice two men at another table. They have been putting back an astonishing quantity of beer and vodka and their eyes have lost all life. They sit across from one another, making occasional gestures. I watch fascinated as one of them starts to sway backward off his chair. He clutches at the tablecloth. His friend does the same and for a few moments the tablecloth acts as a sort of rope in a tug-of-war. Then they slide simultaneously on to the ground, the table and all its contents crashing on top of them. Nobody pays any attention.

After a few minutes, with the men still lying quietly beneath the ruin of their meal, I say to the Intourist woman, "Shouldn't someone see to those men?" "I suppose they must be very busy here tonight," she volunteers. And then adds: "It's now time to go to the cinema."

## CHAPTER XIX

### Let's Go to the Pictures

THE cinema in Petropavlovsk is about what you would expect. A dingy, ill-lit booking hall, with a beshawled dragon peering through the window. We bought balcony tickets for R4.50 each (about 8s. 6d.). Above the cinema screen was the familiar Meere-Meerov slogan, and in between the two words a globe encircled by a great red banner with the peace dove atop it. The circle seats were rough and worn. There was no newsreel, but first we sat through an immensely long and dull film about life on a collective farm, filmed with a lack of imagination or freshness that amounted almost to genius.

These luckless people really get the rough end of the stick. They live in a place like this and go to the cinema to try to forget. And what do they get shown? Life on the collective farm. What a cheer would go up if they suddenly saw an animated cartoon! But no. Even my Intourist lady started impatiently wondering out loud how long the collective farm was going on for.

Next a long interval during which half the audience went to the doors to get some air (very stuffy, even though smoking prohibited. The Russians are determined to beat the winter cold and they do, with the stoves, double windows and all the rest of it. But when warm weather comes the interiors are apt to get airless). And now the feature, the Chekhov story about the girl who marries the old man she doesn't love in order to help out her widowed and dipsomaniac father and her two small brothers. Finally she turns into what my Intourist companion describes as a "naughty flirt" and all ends sadly.

The colour was good and so was the sound, and the film struck me as very good technically.

Next morning we had a call paid on us by one of the

glummiest, most poker-faced types I saw during my whole stay in Russia. He seemed to epitomise the spirit of Petropavlovsk. He was introduced as "curator of the local museum" but when I asked if we could visit the museum he said it was closed for a few days.

Our tour of the town was none too cheery. The "curator" sat in front with the chauffeur and did his best not to answer questions. Now and again he would turn round and look at my camera with anguish. (My pictures of Petropavlovsk were among those which turned out black.) At one point we were held up at a level crossing while a long trans-Siberian passenger train ground past us. The "curator" simply swivelled round in his seat and kept his eyes on me to make sure that no picture was taken of so dangerous a subject.

All bridges of any size, both road and railway, are guarded day and night by armed police or soldiers all over the Soviet Union—another considerable drain on manpower. I asked one man why this was and got back the unexpected reply: "Because of possible sabotage." "What," I said, "sabotage in the Soviet Union? Surely not." He said, "Well, most of it took place a long time ago, before the war, but it is better to take no chances."

We trudged through the Park of Culture and Rest, a smaller, more dismal version of the parks which have been set up all over the country. The music was blasting out of the loud-speakers (this was in the morning) and there were the usual silver-painted statues, including one in honour of Soviet aviatrixes, which stood in the middle of a small pond. One great feature of life in Russia is that a gigantic "greening" (i.e. tree-planting) drive has been carried out. Millions of trees have been planted and the results in most places are gratifying. Such Asiatic towns as Tashkent and Alma Ata set in the middle of hot, dry climates must have been much less attractive when they were almost treeless. Now they are softened and enriched by their trees, in parks and gardens and lining the principal streets.

But Petropavlovsk lacks even a greening offensive. When I asked why, the glum "curator" unwillingly vouchsafed that there is "much salt in the soil, due to seepage from salt lakes nearby, and so the trees may not flourish". It is the finishing touch.

We went and had a look at the church, built in 1803. (The town itself dates from 1752, when a "kamitza", or strong-point, was established against the Kirghiz tribes.) It was said to be "an operating church" (Soviet jargon for "still holding services") but the place looked doomed. Nearby was a hideous lake-front. Everything in Petropavlovsk seemed to be squalid, and this shore was no exception; slummy houses and harsh, muddy, litter-strewn banks—never any grass. Miss Intourist seemed to sense my mood, for several times she reminded me uneasily: "Petropavlovsk is a small place and so has had to wait its turn before the authorities have time to turn their attention to its improvement."

I had asked to see a factory of some kind, and after a long discussion with the "curator" Miss Intourist asked if I would be interested in visiting the local slaughter-house. A slaughter-house in Petropavlovsk seemed just about perfect and I readily agreed—perhaps too readily.

After lunch we taxied out through more wooden slums until we came to the slaughter-house, said to have 6,000 employees. But our tour, although officially laid on, never took place. The secretary, seated in the outer office, looked as if she had crawled into the clothes of a very old charwoman. There was a scarf on her head, a beaten-up blue dress, elastic-sided shoes and thick brown woollen stockings. We walked through corridors and up flights of stairs that were filthy. The office had the inevitable potted palm. Every now and then, while my Intourist woman got angrier and angrier and had a series of terrific telephone arguments with various distant officials, strangely assorted people came wandering in, listened to the row with appreciation and then went on their way.

We were being given the old routine again. The manager, who had been briskly present an hour earlier, was now "seriously ill". The assistant manager? "Very busy. Important decisions." The chief engineer? "On holiday." (I will say this for the USSR. A great many of its senior industrial officials seem to find time for plentiful holidays.)

Miss Intourist was beside herself. She shouted down the phone and there was much repetition of the word "scandale".

I sat there rather enjoying the scene, among the brown plush

curtains, and the worn, dusty wood blocks on the floor, and the potted palm, and the grinning man who came in wearing carpet slippers (one of the slaughterers?) and the peculiar smell, and outside the sweltering sunshine, and the trans-Siberian trains mooing and lowing like lost cattle and Miss Intourist shouting "scandale!" at the top of her voice.

Finally I called her off and told her to summon a taxi. Fresh paroxysms—no taxis available. No matter, I said, let's walk back to the hotel, since there was now nothing else to do. It took nearly an hour, and we were guided by a helpful Kazakh. I looked into the interiors of the chalets as we passed. Many of them had two-tier beds, like ships' berths or train sleepers. The rooms were always cluttered—stoves, tables, whatnots, samovars, side tables. Nearly all, however crummy, had their green thing in the window—a geranium, a fern, anything. Vodka and a potted palm. Those are essentials in Petropavlovsk.

That night we went to the circus in the Park of Culture and Rest, after another dinner during which I had the feeling that almost anything might happen at any time around us. It is a permanent circus, wooden structure and tin roof. My big moment was when one of the performing bears got sick of being hit over the ears with a whip wielded by a formidable-looking female trainer, whirled round and tried to bite her. Missed.

Next day, as we thankfully waited for the plane to take us northwestward to Kurgan in Siberia, I said to Miss Intourist, "Forgive me for touching on this question, but just what did you think of the sanitation at that hotel?"

"Ah," she said. "Each time I have been going to this certain place I have been feeling profoundly pessimistic. . . . But what are you laughing at, Meester MacColl?"



## CHAPTER XX

# Who Wants Money?

ONE of the astonishments for me in the USSR was the great stress laid on money prizes as an inducement to work harder and produce more. Repeatedly as I talked with directors of factories or the bosses of the "Palaces of Culture" (the multi-section super-clubs, where the workers of the various trades are encouraged to spend their spare time) I was told about these "inducements" and bonuses and cash prizes, many of them substantial. And often, when I asked a man or woman what they earned—a question that never causes resentment or embarrassment in the USSR as it might elsewhere—he or she would tell me, and then quickly add, "And then on top of that there are the bonuses."

At a biscuit factory in Baku I was told that there was "a progressive system of prizes" geared to the salary structure. Anyone helping to exceed "the plan" (that "plan" by which millions of Russians live and which dominates their lives) could be sure of getting some extra money over and above his salary. This was a star factory. Its "norm" in the plan was an output of 50 tons a day, but regularly and relentlessly it turned out 53, 54 or 55 tons. The cash flowed in as a result. Only last week the little Armenian with the glass eye and the shy manner who ran the place had got another R6,000 (about £545) as a bonus.

Unskilled workers got 500–700 roubles (£45–£64) monthly. Skilled workers 800–1,400 roubles (£72–£127). The glass-eyed manager got R2,100 (£190) a month, the chief engineer R1,800 (£163) and the "technologist in charge of departments" R1,400 (£127).

The speed and precision with which in this Baku factory the girls worked, in a terrible uproar of pounding machinery, and the metal trays, on which the biscuits entered the ovens on

conveyor belts, whanging and banging on their way back to be recharged, was a fascination to watch. But it seemed to me that the long effort and concentration required drained their faces of expression and induced a sort of robot effect.

The censor saw what I had in mind, when I came to describe the scene in a dispatch, and my original sentence, "I stared fascinated at their flying fingers and mask-like faces" had the words "and mask-like faces" cut from it.

In Tashkent I met the director of the Palace of Culture for Textile Workers (a good-looking, intelligent man, who had been trained for the stage in Moscow). He made R3,000 (£273) a month—"and besides I often receive rewards and good prizes". And "the groups from the textile factories take frequent first prizes and are well rewarded, receiving not only money presents but such pleasant gifts as gold watches". Proudly he showed me the photograph of a woman who "by her timely suggestions" had saved one of the textile factories R4 million (about £365,000) a year. She was awarded a cash prize of R150,000 (about £13,700) "on the spot".

A film studio in Alma Ata. (The clear air of that part of Kazakhstan and the loveliness of the scenery make it a natural spot for making films.) "The salary is only a part of what our workers get. If our workers show diligence there are many rich money prizes to strive for."

Let us have a look at this film studio. To get to it we take a trolley-bus, one of the big blue jobs which are standard all over the USSR. This one is driven by a Kazakh woman. She sits up front in a fairly wide driving compartment, which contains, among other things, a tin bucket half full of water, and, unaccountably, two small roll-top desks, one on each side of her. (For the takings, perhaps? I never found out.)

We pass women carrying wooden halters over their shoulders, from either end of which hang short chains, with buckets dangling at the ends. It seems that Alma Ata's water supply is still on the primitive side.

We get off, and there is the film studio, a modest-looking building, dozing in the sunshine. At the reception desk a youngish woman who has apparently taken a vow never to smile in any circumstances. We fill in forms in heavy silence.

On into the manager's office. He is in his early thirties, handsome, glib, grey eyes, plentiful curly black hair. Bright green suit, no tie, and soiled blue shirt, open at the neck.

Who furnished his office? There is a vase, six feet tall if it's a centimetre, and of hideous design. A big green malachite desk box. A big carved hand blotter (standard fitting, this). And take a look at that ash-tray. Snarling lions patrolling around its sides.

Here is a baffling circumstance. Whereas the director of the Palace of Culture for Textile Workers in Tashkent was trained as an actor, the handsome director of the film studio in Alma Ata was trained as an engineer.

He tells me: that there are now nineteen film studios in the USSR and that this one at Alma Ata is one of the smaller ones. It was built during the war as "an act of faith". Its present output is small—three feature films a year. This year's harvest: (1) a musical comedy; (2) *Daughter of the Desert*, a film to demonstrate the emancipation of the Kazakh woman under the progressive regime; (3) a story of life on the collective farm. They also plan to produce between twenty and forty short documentaries. They budget R5 millions (about £445,000) for the musical comedy.

I ask him about the star system. "No, no, we have no star system. We have instead the system of 'favourite artists'. Never stars. We have also better and worse artists. Nobody with us can ever become a candidate to get more money merely because he is a star. This seems wrong."

Well, how does he get more money?

"If he is a favourite artist and appeals to the public, then he will get more money, most probably."

But he is not a star?

"On no account."

He goes on: "The Soviet public likes new faces and so we search for them. In a few moments you shall see one of the new faces."

The door opens and one of the old faces comes in. Name of Schaken Imanov, who used apparently to be a well-known "favourite artist". Now, however, he is turning to production and he looks like a returned empty of Sessue Hayakawa, with

the wrinkles meeting on his face like a relief map of last year's pomegranate.

He has little to say for himself. He flirts around with an ivory switch, a pattern worked on it, attached to his wrist by a saffron-coloured thread.

He sits there, slumped in a chair, and plays with this ivory switch, looking introspective. "He has achieved the rank of 'People's Artist of the Soviet Union'," announces the manager. "He is also a Stalin Prize Winner."

Tell me about salaries. "Acting beginners get R800 (about £72) a month, rising to R5,000 (about £455). But the salary is only basic. If they show diligence, rich money prizes are attainable."

I ponder this, and the manager looks at me sharply and adds, "They gain these prizes, you understand, not because they are stars but because they are loyal government workers. Here we do not permit or understand the star system."

There is none of that tiresome be-on-the-set-and-made-up-at-6-a.m. Film people here work regular hours. Manager works an 8-hour day, like everyone else. He has a task force of about 400 technicians. And he gets a Pobieda car (meaning "victory" and resembling a Vanguard, more or less) provided free.

He laughs heartily with strong white teeth (and don't think that isn't a change from the gold jobs) at the notion of eager aspirants besieging the front office à la Hollywood. A film career is apparently regarded as anything but glamorous in Kazakhstan. It is just another job—another government job. There is no rush. Off to see the studio in action. It's the set of *Daughter of the Desert*, the picce about female emancipation, and our new acquaintance, Schaken Imanov, is already at his post, still practising mashie shots with the ivory switch.

The set is poky and the whole enterprise startlingly low-keyed and small-time compared with a British or US studio. But I am introduced to a really pretty girl, Zamzagul Shari-pova, aged nineteen. She has the Mongolian features of her native Kazakhstan, but a white skin, great lustrous eyes and a most attractive shy manner. She plays a woman doctor "who proves that Kazakh women richly deserve their new-found emancipation".

Murmurs the manager proudly, "This group of actors fulfilled their plan most admirably for the month of April. They have successfully made 500 metres of film, out of the total objective of 1,700 to be achieved by the end of July."

There is a lackadaisical call for silence. Imanov bends forward and coaches Zamzagul, lying bewitchingly on a bed beneath a tent. "The moment is that the young womanly doctor has learned that there is someone seriously ill in the desert and heroically goes there. She makes the difficult operation in triumph, but alas burns to herself the leg and so is falling sick."

Studio technicians get R7,000 (about £635) to R8,000 (about £720) a month. As the manager and I sit there on hard kitchen chairs (no nonsense about individual chairs with names on their backs) several of the studio technicians drift over and lean across to try to listen to what we are saying. Very chummy.

From the film studio my interpreter and I drove out over vile roads for about twenty miles to visit a collective farm. I think that afternoon was perhaps the most pleasant experience during my whole Russian visit. The atmosphere was clear and stimulating. The sun shone. The great angry, lovely mountain range was a joy to look at. And coming right down to the borders of the farm itself were the green foothills.

And the man who ran the farm was a thoroughly likeable person. I took to him immediately (said my guide next day, "Ah, he is being typical of the new intelligentsia produced by our country." But that was just it—he wasn't typical. He was cheerful, pleasant, and full of exuberant energy. The contrast with the usual glum, closed-in Soviet face was startling).

His name was Meinkov and he told me that his grandparents emigrated to Kazakhstan from the Ukraine in mid-nineteenth century. The farm itself was called Mitchourian—"after an agronomer whose farming theories of a scientific nature have brought him great fame".

It had 1,200 workers representing twenty-six different "nationalities" (i.e. racial strains) and was huge—more like a ranch than a farm. It was rough—rougher than you can imagine. Probably the most down-at-heel, unkempt farm that you have ever seen in this neat, well-scrubbed United Kingdom of ours would look like the Chelsea Flower Show compared to

this place. The answer to that, I suppose, is that it would take far too much time and manpower to tidy up a place of this size. And apart from that, the Russians don't really care what a place—farm, factory, town, civil aircraft, what you will—looks like as long as it gets results.

So, as we drove about—and we drove many miles inside the confines of this farm, jouncing and banging on the fearful tracks—we passed through occasional wildernesses where the weeds and wild flowers grew knee-high. (I stopped the car at one point and got out and gathered a few especially attractive wild roses of palest saffron.) The farm buildings looked terrible. The contrast with, say, Norfolk, or the Pennsylvania Dutch farming country of America was so extreme as to be laughable. It was like the contrast between the gypsy who accosts a Rolls-Royce stalled in traffic on the way to the Derby, and the occupants of the car.

But all the same, once you accepted this roughness and fuzziness and unkemptness, you got a sense of energy, and there were plenty of results to be seen on all sides. Meinkov was particularly proud of his apple trees (*Alma Ata* means "father of apples" and the apples are said by Western experts to be the best in the world). The trees had been badly damaged and many killed by the late frosts and Meinkov grieved over their memory like a father over drowned children. It was rather appealing. And—this was like the nook-and-cranny stuff in the museums all over again—you didn't just drive past the orchards. You got out and patrolled slowly through the rows of the trees—many, many rows—with all the deliberation of someone inspecting a guard of honour. Here you pause to admire the leaves; here to be shown an early blossom: Meinkov was full of his subject—lyrical.

I was sprayed with statistics—half a million young apple trees, costing R3 (about 6s.) each, had been planted to make good the damage. Come and see them. Incautiously I said yes, which entailed another long drive to some distant corner of the estate. 3,000 tons of apples a year were harvested from 370 hectares, 420,000 eggs yearly from the 4,000 hens. There were also 15,000 sheep, 700 horses, 350 pigs; but, significantly, in view of the cattle situation, only a modest 220 head of cattle.

We feel the potatoes and admire the vegetables. We have the stallions taken from their stalls and paraded around in the rough paddock for our benefit (they were magnificent-looking beasts). Then we visit the bulls, which lie like a row of small tanks in bloated glossiness.

Rabelaisian jests are made on the subject of artificial insemination. The Intourist guide blushes. "It is being for me an embarrassing moment, this sort of pleasantry in the presence of men." "Ah, the poor bulls," roars the manager in high good humour. "These splendid fellows have a poor time of it as a result of modern techniques!"

Over to the manager's office (red plush tablecloth, row of chairs). The gold-toothed, silent accompanier who has been with us during the four-hour tour of the farm sits at one side, keenly listening to all that passes. "He is a representative of the workers who keeps an eye on me," says Meinkov with a wink. The gold-toothed one does not smile.

The farm was formed in 1914, and its great size is explained by the fact that it was a combination of quite a few small ones. The workers are said to be fifty-fifty men and women. (In contrast to the manager, all the young workers that I encounter are earnest and serious to the verge of glumness. On the other hand the old workers are smiling and politely wish us "Zsdraft vittie" as we go past.)

Each worker has his own private quarter of a hectare of land. He can grow what he likes on it and use the produce as he wishes. The only stipulation is that he must till it. Workers are "in brigades" of forty each, split up into "platoons" of ten each. Each brigade is responsible for a certain piece of territory—and "for each a certain plan must be fulfilled, or, better still, surpassed". For example "our Prokofiev group has worked so brilliantly that it has doubled its yield per hectare". The workers get a straight 50 per cent of the proceeds from the sale of the extra yield as a bonus. They sell it on the collective market and keep the money.

The worker of the Prokofiev group gets an average of R18,735 (£1,710) a year. In addition he can make money from his own quarter of a hectare plot. It is up to him whether he sells the produce or eats it.

Sheepherders make less, about R13,000 (£1,180) to R15,000 (£1,330) a year.

But here is a revealing fact: out of these 1,200 workers only four have managed to buy cars, and 10 of them motorbikes. "But all have radios—also they buy furniture and carpets and such things."

What about lazy workers or those who fail to give satisfaction in other ways? "The lazy worker, after a fair warning, will receive a ten-day suspension. He has no work, nothing whatever to occupy himself with. He mopes about the farm, gently mocked, perhaps, by the other workers who are going busily about their affairs.

"And the faulty worker hears his name several times a day on the radio of the kolkhoz" (closed-circuit radio systems are a great feature of life in the USSR). "He is denounced and his faults are explained to the others. His name also appears in denunciatory terms in the farm newspaper. He feels his position keenly."

How is it determined when the lazy worker has expiated his shortcomings?

"When there has been a real change of heart, then he is permitted to restart work." The manager paused, twinkled at me from his grey eyes, and added, "You realize that I too can be scolded, should the occasion demand? I can assure you that my committee are not slow to criticise if they feel that I make mistakes." He laughed merrily and glanced over, as if for confirmation, in the direction of Gold-tooth sitting at the side. Gold-tooth looked moodily down at his shoes and failed to respond.

This business of the boss being vulnerable—technically at any rate—to criticism from below is a feature of Soviet life which is much stressed. Most of the bosses I talked to made the point, although often in a bantering sort of way. One boss told me: "I come up for re-election every two years—and so far I have survived." He had held his job since the end of the war.

In Tashkent, the boss of the Textile Workers' Palace of Culture told me, "Only yesterday I was severely reprimanded by my committee. They said that too few of the workers were taking part in some of the 'circles' (clubs). For instance, our



fine library has only 6,000 members. I realized that this criticism was largely merited, but pointed out in extenuation that some of the workers had books in their homes, and there are also fine public libraries available."

And in the magazine *Soviet Union*, June issue, there appeared a photograph of three characters sitting meekly side by side in front of an office desk, listening with respectful rapture to the words of a solemn-looking director sitting behind it. Caption: "When our contemporary *The Combine Builder* printed its caricature and article criticising shop superintendent Pilpenko, he was quickly called in for a personal explanation by the director, and admonished."

This sort of thing I find distasteful. It is bad enough for the luckless Pilpenko to have to get his lumps in the presence of two of his colleagues. But then to have the photograph of the scene given wide publicity seems going a bit far.

But back to Meinkov in Kazakhstan. "We listen to the BBC and the Voice of America and we do not like what they say. The BBC is, unfortunately, often hostile. We read Dickens, Milton, Shakespeare, Galsworthy and other English authors in order to improve our knowledge of British culture. We strive consistently to know more of life, of literature and of art.

"We have our own schools on this farm, and our own shops, a main store, and three branches. Our workers are fond of the ballet and the theatre, and the brigadiers (who of course command the various brigades) come to me from time to time to request permission for the workers to go in groups to see ballet and theatre in Alma Ata. We discuss these matters carefully, looking at the records of the groups concerned. If the plan has not been fulfilled by a group, it is unlikely that they will be allowed to visit the ballet until matters have improved.

"I am the delegated and freely elected chief of this farm," added Meinkov with another of his disarming grins.

As we left the plush-hung office we encountered a little group of workers hanging about outside. Word had apparently spread that a visitor had arrived. Perhaps, after the visit of Nikita Khrushchev only ten days earlier, they expected another VIP from the Kremlin. They looked at me uncertainly, the oldsters

smiling and bowing, the young men producing the glum mask which is the hall-mark of the Komsomol product.

Four hours had gone by and it seemed high time to be on our way. Meinkov wouldn't hear of it. "And now the small refreshment," he urged genially.

Thinking that there might be a bottle of beer, a cup of tea or even a glass of vodka in the offing, I yielded and we repaired to the cottage of one of the foremen. It was much trimmer than the other cottages I had seen as we moved about the farm, white-washed and with a cool, pleasant interior which held the outer heat at bay.

First there was a hand-washing ceremony. An old woman, a nice creature whom I judged to be the grandmother of the young foreman's wife, bustled up with a large tin basin which she laid on the floor. With great courtesy she handed over clean towels and a cake of soap. Then she carefully poured a trickle of water down over my hands into the basin as I washed.

Now into the bedroom. At one side is the steel bedstead, with an elaborate cover. A piece of carpet is tacked to the otherwise bare white-washed wall above the bed. Sit down, gospodeen. I edge into a chair and take a look at an astonishing spread of food. The fairly large table top is completely obliterated by dishes. There is sliced cucumber, herrings in sour cream, three different kinds of sliced sausage, sliced radishes, very bland and almost the size of tomatoes, huge whorls of fresh butter, bread, chunks of chicken, tinned tuna fish, omelettes, hot meat and hot potatoes.

Meinkov, the Intourist woman and I are joined by two other men, one of them the young foreman whose cottage this is. It is noticeable that in spite of the occasion and the considerable quantity of drink which later gets consumed the young men never really relax. Their faces stay wooden. They drink the toasts and get on with their meal. Gaiety never touches them.

The old grandmother and a young woman, presumably the foreman's wife, hover on the periphery of the party. They lend a helping hand and smile widely, almost as though to make up for the wooden demeanour of the young men. Presently the young woman, hearing her infant wail, opens her blouse unselfconsciously and feeds him.

At this moment I wonder if I am at last seeing the "simple, open-hearted, generous Russia" that I am always hearing about. Part of the picture looks right; Meinkov, his tanned face breaking into constant laughter as he hands me dishes and urges me to take more, could not be a more urbane or pleasant host. But those young men! Do not misunderstand me; they are not hobbledehoyes, subject to the agonising shyness and misery of puberty. They are in their late twenties, tough, well-built chaps. But they simply hold a mask up in front of them.

The toasts are in cognac instead of vodka, and they are drunk in small tumblers with no heel taps. There were seven main toasts and I downed a tumblerful of brandy each time. It was Armenian brandy, milder than most, but all the same it made its mark. And belatedly I recalled that I had had only a glass of tea for breakfast and had skipped lunch altogether because the film studio appointment loomed unexpectedly.

Here come bottles of red and white wine. More chicken for the gospodeen. Meinkov looks more benevolent than ever—and he sticks out an enormous hand and we shake. Next moment he has hauled off and fetched me a tooth-rattling blow on the shoulder. Just an old Russian gesture of friendship, it is explained.

Great stuff. I knock back another glass of red wine and come down on him with everything I've got. Roars of laughter and everyone happy.

Wham! He has hit me again, and harder this time. All in good fun—which is the spirit in which I then hit him back. I suppose we gave each other two of the heaviest goings-over that have ever taken place in a friendly spirit. I gave it to him as hard as I could and as luck would have it he was sitting on my left and I happen to be a left-hander.

The occasion wound up in a pink cloud of joviality. The bulls, the stallions, the apples, the brigade workers, the 420,000 eggs, the workers' quarter-hectares—all seemed fused in a friendly glow.

Next morning my left shoulder was barely moveable, the jacket of my lightweight summer suit was mysteriously split right down the middle, and Miss Intourist said sorrowfully that she had had to visit the Kazakh opera by herself.

No matter. It was a very pleasant afternoon on the kolkhoz.

## The Vile 'Capitalist'

THE theme of the wicked capitalist thrives in the USSR.

In Moscow I saw a wonderful chess set, chess being Soviet Russia's national sport. It was elaborately made and the chessmen were of china. One side consisted of an honest Communist team (needless to say there was no king or queen, and certainly no bishops) and the other side a capitalist team.

The pawns of the capitalist side were a row of sad little men with their arms in chains. The piece representing the king wore a top hat. The queen had a whip. On the Communist side the pieces carried big brooms and hammers and sickles. The piece which would otherwise have been the king was driving a tractor. The Communist pawns had their sleeves rolled up.

I am sorry to report that this is now a collector's item, since not many such sets got sold. It was only as the chessmen started to come into production that it was remembered that you couldn't guarantee that the Communist side would win every time. And if the top-hat and whip combo started winning what would happen to morale?

The capitalist—a bloated, frightened, loathsome creature—is constantly pilloried in cartoons and official posters. In a shop in the centre of Moscow I bought a selection of anti-Western, anti-capitalistic posters for a few kopeks each. At first the shopkeeper pushed them across the counter as a matter of course. Then he took another look at me, realised that I was a westerner, saw me laughing, and frowned. It was by then too late to do anything about it, but he became increasingly reluctant and looked relieved when I made to go.

One of these posters that I bought is a great favourite which I saw displayed in factories and palaces of culture in several

towns. It shows Eisenhower and Dulles desperately trying to plug the gaping holes in a leaking balloon labelled "hydrogen threat". With them are a motley crew including a grinning Jap, Robert Schumann of France, Adenauer and others. Below on the ground is a great mass of red banners all bearing the Peace slogan in various languages—and all the flagstaves steel tipped. Despite the threat of the sharp points on these peace banners, top-hatted John Bull has had enough of the balloon and is about to defect from Eisenhower. A poor, trembling creature, Bull is poised ready to jump, his open umbrella held above him as a makeshift parachute.

Cynical Wall Street, the Ku Klux Klan, the lyncher complete with noose, the western armaments king, and always in the background the bloated capitalist. These are some of the stock figures of posters designed for public display inside Russia—designed with official encouragement.

Sometimes this propaganda overreaches itself. A business acquaintance of mine was riding in a Moscow taxi one night and the driver asked him in fair English if he was attached to the embassy. No, said my friend, I am here representing a British business firm. Aha, said the driver, so I am actually carrying in my taxi a vile capitalist, one who grinds the faces of the poor! And with that he bellowed with laughter.

But a Moscow taxi-driver is, comparatively speaking, a sophisticated man. What about the millions who live in the vast outer parts of the Soviet empire? What about the sort of people who asked me solemnly if London had really been bombed? For these guileless ones the hate-the-west propaganda probably does a very effective job.

What do the millions of Soviet people really think about us? Or know about us? When you live in a vacuum it is the easiest thing in the world just to accept what you are told to accept, and believe what you read in the papers and hear on the radio. That radio which is bulldozing away all day long and half the night too. And everywhere you go in the provinces there are neat glass-fronted cases in the streets and squares, on the railway station platforms and in the parks, where *Pravda* is displayed each day. There is no excuse for not knowing what Moscow is thinking.

## JUST BACK FROM RUSSIA

Suppose you are a Russian and in your middle thirties. You have been brought up all your life as a Communist. You were a Pioneer from the age of seven. Later you became a Kom-somol kid. You have been taught to ridicule religion. You have been taught to believe that materialism is the only thing that matters.

You haven't the slightest notion of what life is like in the rest of the world. Someone tells you to read Dickens. So you read Dickens—and think that it is a description of social conditions in Britain 1954. You see a performance of "Charley's Aunt", acted by a Russian cast—and quite genuinely think that all Oxford under-graduates get a kick out of dressing up as women.

You are told that the Soviet set-up is the most perfect thing in life. And you believe that—because there is no way of knowing any differently.

You are part of a captive audience—by far the biggest captive audience in the world today. The obedient laughter and the obedient boo, all the docile reactions of a studio audience—they are there, sounding from 200 million throats.

"Meester MacColl, have you seen any sign of war hysteria here? Do people speak of war?"

Well, let's see. Apart from the fact that casually encounterable Soviet citizens are shooed away from me, thus making it a bit difficult to know what they are thinking, I would say that my hunch is no, people do not talk of war. And no, they are not hysterical about the prospect of war.

That is the advantage of living in the vacuum and being part of the captive audience. If *Pravda* is not worried about war and today's editorial deals with something different, there is very little likelihood of anyone inside Russia talking about war that day.

I think that the chances of "internal disruption" or an "uprising" or any of the other things which the western wishful thinkers talk about are almost as unlikely as was an uprising in Hitler's Germany.

While I was in the Ukraine two incidents took place, unlike anything else which happened to me while I was in the USSR. I was dining one night in the restaurant of a hotel when I

became aware that someone was trying to attract my attention at the next table. I glanced round and saw two men sitting looking over at me. I looked back at them inquiringly, whereupon keeping their hands carefully below the level of their table, and quite obviously feeling that they were making a significant gesture, they gave me the Thumbs-up sign.

I smiled and nodded. They beamed back. Then, looking carefully about them, they both gave me the thumbs-up all over again. It sounds trivial but you can take it from me that in the USSR that sort of clandestine triviality is uncommon.

The second thing was this. Somewhere in the Ukraine—and I am making this vague on purpose—a meal was served me by a white-haired waiter. He served it well and carefully and impersonally. We were alone and without possibility of being watched. All was impeccably in place on table, the dishes and the drink. I looked up at him casually and smiled my thanks.

And then he reached out and grasped my right hand in both of his, gazed at me intently, wrung my hand again and with dignity left the room.

This sudden wordless gesture moved me very much. Coming after weeks and months of frozen faces it was a completely unexpected reminder of normal human friendliness. I am in the debt of that man.

Back in Moscow I had asked permission to go to Vilna, the capital of Lithuania. You recall that in the free-wheeling days of 1940 the Soviets overran the three independent Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Esthonia.

My request to go to Vilna was turned down by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They tried to turn it down without actually mentioning that they had done so, the technique of sweeping the dust under the carpet. I had written the formal letter saying could I go to Kharkov, Kiev and Vilna.

The telephone call came back a week later. "Well, it is all right for your trip. All is in order."

"ALL?" I asked, disbelievingly.

"Certainly. You shall go to Kharkov and Kiev. We hope you will have a most satisfactory and enjoyable time."

"But what about Vilna?"

"About Vilnus? Ah, no, that is being impossible."

Always I would ask why. This time was no exception. "Why?" I asked.

"Meester MacColl, this is being not possible. It is forbidden."

"But why?"

"Please, it is well known that such visits are not being permitted."

"Yes, but why?"

"If you are wishing to know the reasons you must ask to the British Embassy. They are possessing the full list of places which are being unfortunately unavailing to tourists."

So there it was. After those two little episodes in the Ukraine the reason becomes fairly obvious. If people in the Ukraine feel that way about a stray westerner, can you imagine what would happen if someone from the western side of the iron curtain turned up in Vilna, in Riga or in Tallin?

If word got around, the people would block the street just to shake the visitor's hand, and the authorities aren't taking any chances on that.

In Kharkov the hotel band, doing its best, played "St. Louis Blues" in my honour. In Vilna I think they would have rallied around with "Tipperary".

Next morning in Kharkov I mentioned the "St. Louis Blues" rendition to a local official. "Ah yes," he said. "There is a vogue just at present for Latin-American tunes. This I believe is being an Argentinian melody?"

"No, I said, USA. A classic." He frowned and was about to give me an argument, when the luckless girl secretary piped up.

"If you are having the word 'blues' in the title it is without question being a North American ballad," she said brightly.

Such a dirty look she got from the boss.

On this business of keeping the locals away from the visitors, one used to notice it in the Koktel Hall. When I first reached Moscow in April the Koktel Hall was still at the receipt of custom, down there at the foot of Gorki Street.

I never quite knew what the Koktel Hall was supposed to be doing. The Soviet authorities did not like it; that was



clear. It was there as a sort of sop to the effete western visitors (who felt far more effete and much older after an hour or so inside it). Some Russians used to hang out there—Russians with pretensions to a sort of western style bohemianism. If Moscow could produce anything like a French existentialist, the Koktel Hall was the place where you would have found him, assuming you felt like trying to find him.

Anyway, last April this was the Koktel Hall: you gave your hat and coat to one of two or three elderly men who ran the cloakroom, then went on into the bar.

Two mammoth amazons were working the bar. They looked like fugitives from the womens' gymn team of the Soviet olympic squad at the Helsinki games. Every time they picked up a shaker their biceps would bulge defiantly through the sleeves of their black satin dresses. They were not two- but four-ton Tessies.

In the gallery above, a string band was dashing off waltz tunes. They did it rather well. The "Blue Danube". The "Chocolate Soldier" and so on. The only trouble about the gallery was that now and then an exuberant customer would sling a plate or a glass over the edge. If it hit nobody going down but merely smashed on the floor no one paid any attention. If it landed on a head then there might be trouble.

At the side of the bar lurked an old tired woman wearing a sort of shorthand note of a nurse's dress. Her mission in life was simple: to mop up after any customer who found the cocktails too difficult to stay with.

It was a semicircular bar, grey marble on top and quasihogany below. Behind the two female welter-weights was a pyramid. Its base consisted of a shelf of chocolates, sweets, eclairs and cream slices, flanking a bottle of Soviet champagne in a bucket. Then a line of thirty-five bottles containing fruit cordials, syrups and extracts. Then some mystery liquids in fancy stone bottles. Up on the apex another bottle of Soviet champagne, with glass penguins on each side.

All drinks were consumed through straws. And what is more, most of the patrons ordered between two and five drinks apiece *simultaneously* and drank them all through straws. One man had a row of eight drinks in front of him.

My own drink was listed as "The Lighthouse", cost R6.50 (about 13s.) and took some time to prepare. The amazon started with a raw egg broken into some lemon cordial, then put it aside to stand while a couple of other customers were attended to. Then came a jigger of Soviet champagne, vodka, brandy, raspberry syrup, plum brandy, creme-de-menthe, orange liqueur, soda-water and ice. A line of foam lay on top of this by the time my amazon had got done with shaking it.

Fifteen high stools around the bar. Tables out on the floor, where couples were bravely sampling such offerings as "Spirit of Spring", "Comradeship" and "Footsteps of the Red Army". The two young men next me, who in a blurred sort of way looked like minor Bloomsbury-ites (turtle-neck sweaters, beards, spotty faces) each ordered two drinks at once. One was a champagne cocktail and the other a bright crimson job, entitled appropriately "Red Star". They also downed a rich cream cake a piece (this at eleven o'clock at night).

That noise you hear which sounds like something frying in a deep pan is in reality the bill being totted up on the abacus. For the abacus is used here in the Koktel Hall just as it is through the length and breadth of the land. Somewhere a customer breaks into song. There are no martinis. Indeed there is no gin, although there is Soviet *visky*. That I never tried.

Since the Koktel Hall was an attempt, however abortive, to imitate western institutions, it tended to attract Russian clients who were not enthusiastically regarded by the authorities; clients who were vaguely zoot-suit, perhaps had a furtive liking for be-bop, possibly a hint of the type teddy boy. Rather decadent characters, it might be.

Attempts at chit-chat between Russian and Western samplers of the cocktails were usually broken up fast. The technique was that the manager would come trotting up at the first sign of a dawning acquaintance and tell the Russian that he was urgently wanted on the telephone. The Russian would go away—and then leave the Koktel Hall either without coming back to finish his drink at all, or else doing so in one fast gulp and with a swift good night.

One night an obstinate fellow who apparently saw no reason

## JUST BACK FROM RUSSIA

for having his evening spoiled returned smilingly to his Western friends from "telephone call" after "telephone call". The manager looked desperate but still the "calls" came in. Finally, after a long heart-to-heart with the manager in a corner, the Russian apologised and said he must go home now.

But the Koktel Hall was on its last legs. The authorities had been paying more attention to the problem of alcoholism, and there had been angry editorials about the growing menace of "gooliganism". Reports of the exploits of young "gooligans" and juvenile delinquents began to appear in the Soviet press.

In May the Koktel Hall was suddenly closed—"for repairs". And when I left in July there were rumours that it was re-opening as a tea shop. I wonder what became of the big barmaids?

## Smart Night Out

WHEN you are in the USSR you can never for one moment forget that that is where you are. The scene is always strange, always utterly unlike anything that you know in the West.

You start to use a word or phrase to describe something, and then you pause. Technically that is the correct word—but will it convey the right picture to a Western reader?

You can talk about a “crowded luxury restaurant” but what that phrase would mean in Britain has little relevance in the USSR.

Look at the place we are in now. It is new, and no expense has been spared in the decorations and appointments. A great, high-ceilinged room, with green and pink marble, mosaics, solid pillars. A big band is playing away (too loudly for our taste but that is apparently the way they like it here), the menu is more varied than in most Soviet restaurants, and the service here a bit more reminiscent of that note I saw recently in a British guide book to Russia vintage, 1893, “Service is very good; the slightest want is quietly and promptly supplied by the most civil of waiters, attired in bright-coloured silk shirts, worn over another garment of equal effect and neatness.”

But the people! In this whole vast place, packed with men and women who are cheerfully spending the equivalent of eight or nine pounds on their meals, there is not one hint of elegance or style.

The diners are dressed anyhow, in cheap-looking, ill-cut, often shoddy clothes. There hangs over the entire scene an inexorably provincial atmosphere, the same atmosphere that I encountered in the Soviet sector of East Berlin when I tried a night out there not long ago.

Half the men have not shaved. Some are not wearing any

ties. Most have crudely coloured shirts, of startling design—mauve lines on pink, that sort of thing.

As the night wears on and the drink takes hold and the heads come down onto the tables (quoting again from the 1893 guide: "The climate must to some extent be responsible for the habit of drunkenness unfortunately so prevalent among the lower classes of Russia") the scene begins to resemble something for Hogarth or Rowlandson.

But come to think of it, these *are* the lower classes. This that we are watching is the triumph of the proletariat. The aristocrats were liquidated forty years ago; so were the intelligentsia. This presumably is the way the Soviet people prefer to do things, like the deafening style of the band.

In Moscow you can get turned away from a restaurant because it is full, or because it has been taken over suddenly by the delegation of the railway workers' union, but—as long as you have the price on you—you won't get turned down for any other reason.

Come along in overalls, with five o'clock shadow dark on your chin, and no tie. And the not so little woman arrayed in a piece of plush that looks like a Widow Twankey costume for the male comic in a No. 5 touring panto. "Posholista!"—and you are swept to a table nestling beneath the green marble pillars.

This is truly democratic. And so is the way in which all ranks in the services are on a common footing when off duty. In Russia it is perfectly all right to go and ask a woman for a dance in a public place even if she is dining tête-à-tête with a man. In the Metropole one night I saw a naval rating boldly make his way up to a table where two Army majors were sitting with women companions and dance first with one and then another of the ladies. I am bound to admit that the majors looked none too enthusiastic over this help from the navy, but there it was.

There was rather an awkward moment a few nights later when a Westerner was entertaining a girl from one of the Scandinavian diplomatic missions to dinner at the Metropole. I had dropped by to have coffee with them and we looked up to find a young Red soldier bowing unsteadily and inviting

the girl to dance. She refused politely enough, but he was flabbergasted. He urged her to reconsider, but she persisted in her refusal. Then came a difficult interlude. The soldier clearly did not wish to return to his table thus frustrated, and so he stayed with us for what seemed a long time, making conversation. Finally he went away.

Go to the ballet in the fine Bolshoi (Big) Theatre. Again you find the great contrast between the setting and the people. The auditorium is magnificent in its proportions and decoration. The ballet is superbly danced and staged. Here, you think, should be an "occasion".

But alas—the people bring you back to earth with a bump. There they all are, swarming around in those terrible clothes, never a touch of grooming or elegance, never any attempt to "dress up"—or if there is, then I missed it.

Let's stand here in the buffet at the interval as they come cascading in for beer and sandwiches, ice-cream and sweet cakes, and—if the rushing, overworked waitresses can get around to it—the occasional bottle of Soviet champagne.

There are many uniforms, of course, as always all the time in the USSR, and these look well. And there may be a few Uzbeks or Tajiks, up visiting the big city from far away, wearing their native dress unselfconsciously. A sprinkling of Westerners from the embassies, all of them suffering to some extent from "Moscow Malaise", the goading urge to get out and go somewhere—anywhere—that sooner or later afflicts all visitors.

But these apart, the crowd is relentlessly drab. Since the war London theatre audiences have been criticised for their falling from the standards of the old days. But when I went to the theatre in the West End for the first time since my return from the USSR I gaped in delighted astonishment at what was, by contrast with Russia, a scene of richness and good grooming, fine clothes and lovely women.

Or come along to Gorki Park, the huge playground of the people, on the bank of the Moscow River. Its acres were reclaimed in the mid-thirties from waste land.

You beat your way across a bridge. It is midnight and such a mob of people is coming the other way that you think that

you must have made a mistake and that they have closed the place for the night. But no—a huge mob may have left, but there is another huge mob still inside.

The whole place—acres of it—is blazing with lights. It turns out to be a combination of public park, amusement centre, open-air prom and theatreland. Culture lies down with the hot dogs. High-grade music here—and a dodgem just down there.

There was a minor surprise behind every bush—here a group of shirtsleeved men staring at a TV programme. Next moment I am in the middle of the Garden of Chess. Surrounded by lofty shrubs, fat, intent men are sitting in rows playing the national game. My instinct is to walk on tiptoe and whisper, but that isn't at all the way chess is played in the USSR. Comments from the onlookers who cluster round every contest are made out loud, and a good move is greeted with brisk applause.

You keep coming on open-air auditoria and concert halls. Some empty, others in use; here for instance a woman in a huge white dress is singing away while a man in a brown suit accompanies her on the piano. Quite a big crowd sitting listening.

There are restaurants in profusion and snack stands and soft drink bars, pleasaunces and gazebos, and statues—hundreds of statues, posturing and staring and rising white amid the greenery. Fountains too, and flowerbeds, and lakes, and what in winter time are skating surfaces, and funfairs. It is a well-lighted cross between Versailles and Happy Hampstead.

Some of the vistas in the place are attractive. But the general effect on me was of ceriness. Even this place of relaxation and amusement, with masses of people living up at the water's edge to catch the water-buses home, seemed to me a little nightmarish.

The giant pictures everywhere of Lenin and Stalin on their blood-red backgrounds. The slogans posted up at every turn. The graphs telling you about the next Five Year Plan—and how much oil they were going to raise, how much more steel and so forth. The forest of statues. The spotlights on the

chlorophyll. It was all very odd. But these people, although not well dressed, were at least adequately clothed. They all looked well fed. They all seemed to have money in their pockets for drinks and biscuits and the funfairs. And they all probably thought it was a lovely place.

I think that the moment when the contrast between surroundings and people came at me most strongly was when I was being taken through the Tretiakov Art Gallery, one of Moscow's finest.

For an hour or more I walked through rooms filled with portraits painted by Russian artists who were the contemporaries of Romney and Gainsborough—men like Rokotov, Libitsky and Borovikovski (who did a very fine portrait of Madame de Staël). There were all these amiable-looking men and women in their familiar-looking hats and clothes and jewels and plumes.

Then we entered in the nineteenth-century section—again all very familiar; the white collars and Byronic shirts, the black floppy ties, the pale pensive faces of Pushkin and Glinka and Alexander Brullon. These could have been English or French or Italians.

And then I turned my gaze from the pictures of the dead to the living people of the Soviet present, as they ambled about me, goggling up at the works of art, and—crash!

Not any link here, even tenuous, with the people of the West. Just this weird crowd of stocky peasant types, and factory workers, and bumpkins. On the walls, elegance and distinction and aristocracy. On the floor—the proletariat.

What passes through the minds of these living Soviet citizens as they gaze on the work of the past? Does it ever occur to the Communists that nearly all the beauty of their country, the architecture, the churches and monasteries, the jewels and ikons and glorious treasures of the Kremlin and the Hermitage in Leningrad, were wrought by artists and craftsmen long before the revolution?

Now let's go out to the race track. Or rather, let's go out to it for the second time. The first time I tried I duly got there on a day when racing was said to take place, only to find, after kicking my heels for forty minutes, that racing was



cancelled because—an argument I didn't follow—"next weekend will be the May Day parade".

Before that the secretary of the track, a woman, had assured us: "Racing starts at 6 p.m. promptly, Comrades." This is typical of the USSR—last-moment changes in arrangements, re-jigging of schedules, almost total ignorance of what is going to take place when.

Repeatedly I would be assured in various towns that there was to be a ballet performance that very night. I would ask for tickets. An hour later the guide would say too bad, no ballet that night after all—it would be the day after tomorrow instead.

The peak example of this was when Malenkov started delivering his annual speech to the Supreme Soviet meeting in the Kremlin—without the slightest advance notice to anyone.

He just appeared and started in. The diplomats gallery in the supreme soviet was empty save for a single junior official from one of the Western embassies—whose telephone hardly stopped ringing for the rest of the day, as everyone else sought desperately to get a first-hand fill-in from him.

None of the foreign correspondents had been tipped off ahead of time and some sharp calls of protest were put in to the press department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. But correspondents found their own annoyance unexpectedly disarmed when the press department spokesman explained with a moan: "But gentlemen—*we* were not told."

After May Day was a thing of the past I tried the races again. They are trotting races and the track is called the Hippodrome. It is a scene almost desolate in its austerity. Any resemblance between the Hippodrome at Moscow and Auteuil or Newmarket is not a coincidence, it's a miracle.

The stands are down-at-heel and crumbling; the entrances tattered, the betting places mere wooden shacks. The circular track stretches off over a barren field of mud and tired timid grass. The whole set-up has a look of impermanence, like the buildings for a minor cattle show.

It is raining. The jockeys wear the most bedraggled, sad-looking silks you ever clapped eyes on. Their little chariots are rusty and tatty. But the ponies look in good fettle. There

are nine races on the card—and the card carries a notice asking that spectators strictly observe the rule that there must be no applause or demonstrations.

They observe it only too well. It is the grimmest, most silent little crowd I have ever been in. Although we are only about twenty minutes' taxi ride from the centre of Moscow, and still well inside the city limits, only about two or three thousand people have turned out.

They sit in the wooden stands, exchanging comments in low tones, or else they sit placidly in the heavy rain, quaffing Pilsen-type beer, eating hard-boiled eggs, potato salad and red caviar sandwiches.

The interpreter—not an Intourist man, but the private interpreter of a colleague—produces a nice phrase. He has been rather noticeably shuffling from foot to foot for some time, and now he says: "If you are kindly excusing me for a moment, sir, I am seeking a certain secluded little place."

The course is churned-up rich mud. What seems rather a confusing circumstance is that a jumping competition is going on in the middle of the field; this has no connection with the trotting races, but a woman's high-pitched voice comes over a loud-speaker keeping us informed of how the jumping competitors are doing, and various people keep drifting across the track in a casual sort of way to watch the jumping for a bit.

Not only does the little crowd show great restraint in not giving any shouts of encouragement to their horses while the race is finishing, but even more superhuman is that there is no Russian equivalent to the "They're off!" of British race-courses.

There are any number of false starts, to the evident annoyance of a white-haired man perched by himself on a little metal stand and acting as starter. Somewhere there is a "principal judge" and, says another note on the race cards, "the decisions of this official are final and are in no way to be disputed by members of the public".

The jockeys go at their jobs with great intensity, bracing their feet against a bar, keeping a tight rein, and leaning far back above their two-wheeled chariots. . . . Now we have another false start, the fifth, and the white-haired starter is

stamping his high boots in fury and shouting at the competitors as they turn and amble back.

The horses have names like Treeleaf, Alphabet, Primula, Branch, Aviation, Gilda, Conflict, Volga, Tempest, Diligence, Mountain Chill, Cactus, The Ghost, Wolf, Lottery and Calories. This being a country which likes to do things by numbers rather than by name—"Waiter, a bottle of No. 3." . . . "Meet me in Beerhall No. 27 for a few tonight, Comrade?"—you read on the card: "The Wolf, owned by collective ranch No. 19" or "Heather, owned by collective ranch No. 2. . . ."

They are coming up again and it looks as if this time the white-haired starter will avoid a stroke after all. Yes—one short clang on the bell and an electric buzzer and the starter plunges down his flag. From the onlookers—no sound. It is as in a dream. After we had watched two or three of these items a British friend and I decided to have a flutter. So off we went to the ten-rouble window and there parleyed with the woman well protected behind the bars. We indicated that "Chastity" struck us as being a likely entry. Something was amiss however and she would not take our money. At the end of a very long discussion we got the point—in Russia, at all events at the trotting races, you do not back one horse per race but two.

While we were considering this, a raffish-looking type in the queue just behind us nudged us, and with a smirk pointed to numbers 4 and 7 on the card. It happened that 4 was Chastity, while 7 was a horse called The Weeper. Thanking our friend, we finally got our money on and hurried back to our places in the little wooden stand. Almost from the bell it was a romp-away for our two nominees. They came down the course neck-and-neck with the others nowhere. We were guilty of grossly bad form, for as they swept past the winning post as though glued together, we gave tongue: "Good old Weeper!" I cried. "Three cheers for Chastity!" roared my friend, and we compounded the felony by clapping loudly. We got some very bleak looks for our pains.

Undeterred we hurried off to collect. But no, some slip-up. What can it be? Vainly we indicate the winning numbers on our ticket. The woman has plenty to say but no money to hand over. After another tedious argument it develops that

we have unwittingly bought the sort of ticket which is good only for a double. We are not only betting on two ponies in each race but on two in two races—a quadruple in fact.

Here is a crisis, and we turn instinctively to our friend the unshaven tipster. We run him to earth behind a big garlic sausage and a bottle of *piwa* (“beer”). He gets the problem with promptness—a man among men, this—and unhesitatingly points to numbers 2 (“Dynamism”) and 6 (“Tension”) for the fourth. We charge back to the ticket window, but too late, for the bell pings before we can make known our choice.

This tipster of ours clearly has some excellent information, for Dynamism and Tension execute an exact repeat of the Weeper-Chastity performance, trotting away from the field with an ease that verges on insolence, their pretty knees glistening in the rain.

After that we never saw our man again, I can’t think why. With a crowd as thin as that I should have thought we couldn’t have missed. But maybe the Hippodrome equivalent of the Koktel Hall manager had tapped him on the shoulder and told him he was wanted urgently on the phone.

## CHAPTER XXIII

# The Inventors of Everything

I WAS first reminded of the magic name of Alex Popoff as I paused while inspecting a brand-new Pioneers' Palace in Siberia—so brand-new that I am afraid that I left capitalistic footmarks in the still fresh paint on the floor—to have a look at the “radio-learning section”, where the children, seven to seventeen, would soon be finding out about dots and dashes.

On the wall hung the portrait of a dignified but slightly melancholy looking man, in a Victorian-style choke collar. Who is that? I ask. “It is Popoff, the man who discovered radio—you must have heard of him. Ah, you in the West give credit to that Italian—what was his name again—but of course it was Popoff who actually made the discovery before anyone else.”

But why wasn't this discovery announced more widely at the time? “Because it was in Tsarist days, and the regime of that period was not alert to the supreme importance of this discovery. In Moscow there are documents making all perfectly clear what happened.”

So when I got back to Moscow I lost no time in repairing to the Polytechnic Museum to inspect the record of this and similar marvels. The Communists cannot lay claim to the credit for any of these inventions since nearly all of them took place in the nineteenth century, long before the Revolution. But, just as such men as Suvarov and Kutusov and Ivan the “Great” (Terrible) are now admitted as heroes, although pre-Revolutionary, so the bourgeois and imperialistic taint of the nineteenth-century inventors is nowadays expunged by the glory of nationalism.

As someone explained it to me: “We are merely re-establishing the truth, which was for long lost sight of. The Tsarist

regime could not believe that anything done by Russians was successful. On the other hand, a foreigner had only to make a claim for the Tsarist authorities to accept it unquestioningly. So Russian inventions never received the honour and acclaim which should have been theirs. Now we show the truth. The Soviet people can in these days find out about the resourcefulness and great mental powers of the Russian people."

So here we are in Moscow's equivalent of the Science Museum in South Kensington, the Polytechnic. Its custodians are elderly women, with shawls on their heads and dusters in their hands, who wander around or stand by to set in motion some working model. In the entrance lobby we pass a group of Czech-built cars which were given to Stalin for his seventieth birthday. He handed them on to the Polytechnic without using them, to judge by their tyres.

Popoff is upstairs. "The world's first radio apparatus, Popoff's wireless telegraph", says the notice, and alongside it again an oil painting of the great man, also done in pensive mood. I imagine that Popoff did not sit for portraits during his life-time as this work, like the one in Siberia, has the blurred, rather unconvincing look of a picture done from an old photograph.

Here is "his first working model, made in 1895". "Let us make it work," beams a custodian, and he taps a remote control key which causes a shower of sparks to fly and a doorbell, attached to the cigarbox-like receiver, to ring furiously—to the delight of a party of young Pioneers who have paused to observe and now clap.

We are reminded of Popoff in another way—for the whole museum is filled with broadcasts booming from the inescapable loudspeakers, the choirs and orchestral selections and newscasts that we are getting to know so well.

What is the truth about Popoff? He did in fact design a receiver, complete with aerial, earthed terminal and "decoherer" as a meteorological instrument to plot the differences of atmosphere—in 1895. In 1896 Marconi got his patent, in England, for an electric-wave transmitting system and his system was the first to produce a transmitter capable of covering big distances.

Popoff comes into the picture, therefore, in any historical survey of radio—but then, and in a much bigger way, so does Marconi. To hear the Russians tell it, Popoff thought the whole thing up, and that is the impression left in the minds of the young Pioneers and all the other visitors to the museum. If the Tsarist regime regarded foreigners as wonderful, the Communist regime does its best to make up for that.

In an adjoining room we now contemplate another oil painting. This time a collection of nineteenth-century fuddy-duddies are gathered in a lecture room according a standing ovation to someone up on the dais and brandishing in his hand a small object whose nature is not immediately apparent.

Who can this be? Why, it is A. H. Lodigin “demonstrating the world’s first electric-light bulb in Saint Petersburg in 1875”.

That gives Lodigin a flying start over Thomas Edison, who presumably arranged his publicity much more effectively from the USA some five years later. And this? The first electromagnet telegraphic apparatus in the world, that of P. L. Shilling, “demonstrated at St. Peterburg in 1832”. Hmm. Well, if that is so, then America’s Samuel Morse should have tapped out as his own first message not “What God hath wrought” but rather “What P. L. Shilling hath wrought”.

Now what next? A delicately constructed scale model of a steam engine, which a custodian sets going for us. Whose? It was a model of the world’s first, invented by L. I. Polsunov in 1766. This time the accompanying notice spells matters right out, and even goes so far as to name the foreign interloper —“Polsunov’s engine was twenty years before that of the Englishman John Watt”. I say! This is a blow. James Watt of Scotland (1736–1819) is usually given the credit for the steam-engine discovery—but can it be that poor Polsunov had his prior invention thrown into the discard by the Tsar? My colleague Harrison Salisbury, the distinguished former correspondent in Moscow of the *New York Times*, produced a pleasant summation. Apprised of the Polsunov claim, he sardonically referred to Watt in one of his cabled messages as “The Tardy Scot”.

The rest of the Polytechnic exhibits, although not on this high plane of international controversy, are not without interest.

## JUST BACK FROM RUSSIA

There is a large selection of such objects as washing machines, refrigerators, radio and TV sets, and gigantic record-changers of most ornate décor—elaborate inlaid woods, etc. Then there were electric cookers, electric kettles and other kitchen labour-savers. Roughly dressed visitors pored over all this with longing in their eyes, and it seemed to be the equivalent of the glossy magazines of Britain and America, where you can feast the gaze on enticing advertisements. The USSR has no glossies or that kind of advertisement, and so you go along to the museum to have a look at the refrigerator or the TV set which you may, with luck, be able to afford one day.

Stray remarks I treasure from tours of Soviet museums (both were made in Leningrad). "Here is a picture of Cromwell, the leader of the deplorable bourgeois English revolution."

*MacColl:* Why deplorable?

*Guide:* A bourgeois revolution must of its own nature be deplorable.

*MacColl:* Well, what is a bourgeois revolution?

*Guide:* A revolution which solves nothing. A true revolution is the Soviet socialist revolution of Russia.

"Here is a memorial to the Russian troops who were—of course—the first to enter Paris in the War of 1813."

(In the Moscow subway.) "Here are all scenes from the defence of the Russian motherland: invaders from Poland, the Tartars and Turkey are being flung back. Here is Marshal Suvarov crossing the Alps."

*MacColl:* The Alps?

*Guide:* Yes, a great feat of arms.

*MacColl:* But wasn't that a rather remote defence of the Motherland?

*Guide:* No. It was necessary.



## Reception Desk in Siberia

WE ARE sitting waiting at the airfield of Petropavlovsk for the plane to take us to Kurgan, in Siberia. It is so wonderful to be getting away from Petropavlovsk that it doesn't really matter what Kurgan turns out to be. It is difficult to see how it could be any worse than this.

The sun shines down hard, and what seems to be the entire staff of the little airport is outside playing an impromptu game of soccer between planes. A few horses stray across the field, munching without much conviction at the scanty tufts of grass.

A squadron of ancient biplanes is drawn up on one side of the field, including one painted white with a red cross on its side. There are hovels and dugouts round the edge of the field, and an old whitebearded chap who lies full length and eats something. On the far horizon a small "twister" (a miniature travelling dust storm) makes its way along. A group of peasant women plods (but not "patiently", MacColl—never that) towards the shimmer of the heat haze. Miss Intourist, my guide, is bitten on the calf by a large horse-fly and goes to get first-aid.

An hour's flight and Kurgan. The arrival wasn't too promising, a drive into town along yet another disastrous road, the taxi having to crawl at about ten m.p.h. Faster than that and we would have been in danger of braining on the roof.

But at the hotel—a great surprise. A modern concrete building. A clean interior. A brisk and businesslike Madame Administrator (who is tremendously proud of the fact that at fifty-five she has her own teeth and hair). "Am I not young-looking?" she asks. "Guess my age!" From that it is a short step to a little propaganda for the Siberian climate. "Cold—yes. But so healthy. People live to a great age here and are so

hardy. The cold is not a damp cold, and unless there is a bad wind one does not feel it too much."

The hotel was originally intended for some other purpose. "But because so many peoples are now coming to Kurgan they are transforming it into a hotel." My suite has a proper toilet (no bath, but don't let's quibble), a room telephone, a radio, new furniture and large photographs on the wall, which are a great relief from the interminable oil paintings which one gets to know so well.

I say I would like to visit a barber. Not necessary—a barber will wait upon the gospodeen in a very few minutes. Sure enough there quickly comes a knock on the door and I open it to find a young girl, perhaps eighteen or less, standing there dressed in white, and carrying a great deal of impedimenta. At first I took her for the assistant who had come to prepare the ground; but no, she was herself the barber.

She did a deft and efficient job too; shave, haircut, shampoo, and, with a murmur of apology, she washed my ears into the bargain, an attention which I have received nowhere else in the world. She was a pleasant girl, smiling and nice, and showing no hint of the Communist closed-face.

Next down to dinner in the crowded little restaurant. Vodka, borsch, and a form of ravioli with meat inside. Port the only wine, though. In this part of the country they seem to prefer the wine, sweet. Outside we find the road up, and it looks as if it had been that way quite a long time, for the piles of earth thrown up by the spades are baked hard and the duckboards put across the gaping trench look semi-permanent.

Kurgan, by the way, which in World War I had a population of about 11,000 is now edging up towards the 100,000 mark.

A Tartar prince started the place as a fortress, but the town was later rebuilt to a symmetrical plan, because many of the "Decembrists" were exiled here after their abortive revolution of 1825. They came from St. Petersburg and did their best to reproduce the orderly streets and squares of their city.

I am glad that I saw Petropavlovsk because I gather that only four years ago Kurgan looked a good deal like Petropavlovsk does today. Kurgan is now in the middle of a big improvement-and-development plan, and if it really did start so recently from scratch then remarkable things have been done.

The centre of the town is being entirely rebuilt—and, in contrast to so much of what I saw elsewhere, there were people actually working on the new buildings; a great many people and with visible energy.

They are proud of their new theatre, and rightly. It was one of the few post-revolution buildings which I liked. It had taste and style, and the auditorium, seating 700, had walls the colour of red burgundy and white balconies, excellent mouldings, also white-painted, a fine, delicately executed roof, and a huge candelabrum of simple and good design.

Off the circle an equally attractive buffet-lounge; white pilasters against deep blue walls, the effect rather Wedgewood and most satisfactory. The spotlights are kept, as in other Soviet theatres, in two boxes high up at the sides in view of the audience.

Near the theatre are blocks of flats being pushed to a finish, a half-finished cinema (not being worked on when I saw it), the Pioneers' Palace where the paint was still wet, a new building for the local Soviet, and others.

"Our dream is to do away eventually with every wooden house in this town and to have everything of stone." They have a long way to go—everywhere one turns it looks like a posed study of old and new, crazy old Petropavlovsk-style chalets up against the big modern structures. But with the sense of drive and energy I get here the whole thing becomes feasible.

There are still many people here—the majority—who look like immemorial Russia in a cartoon; the peasants in their shawls and high boots, and knickerbocker-type trousers and general air of looking round the corner at you from a couple of centuries ago. And here, as elsewhere in the USSR, people tend to sit down on the pavement or even occasionally the roadway (even in Moscow, away from the middle of the town you will see men sitting or squatting at the pavement's edge).

A photo I was shown in the local museum of Kurgan sixty years ago made it look intriguingly like an American Wild West town of the same period; wide dusty street, timber one-storey façades, a few signs swinging, a hitching rail, horse-drawn buggies and all.

Siberia has a Wild West geography. It is an area of enormous rivers, forests, prairies—and distances. Like the Wild West, Siberia has moved a long way from the frontier days. But it has a very long way still to go before it can begin to compare even remotely with any part of the USA today. Kurgan is just getting used to trolley buses and traffic lights. There is plentiful electricity, but away from a few main streets the roads are frightful. It may take another ten or a dozen years before the wooden chalets have all been replaced and the great new town replanning of which they proudly show you a model is finished. Standards of living compared with the USA (or Britain) are still woefully low. As all over the USSR, workers are taken to their jobs in lorries—standardised lorries painted dark green. Privately owned cars are very rare, modern sanitation virtually unknown; and although more consumer goods are coming into the shops as a result of the Malenkov decrees, the availability of goods and services and the quality of the things on sale is so far below Western standards that it is difficult to compare them.

The first evening in Kurgan Miss Intourist and I went to the cinema (the old one) to see a colour movie entitled appropriately *Song of Siberia*. For the price of admission we got a flesh-and-blood concert thrown in beforehand: a Ukrainian girl singer. *Song of Siberia* turned out to be a musical romance no worse and possibly better than the same type of thing produced in the West. Story and acting were often corny, but the colour and music were very good. But we had the same absurd nuisance as at the *Sleeping Beauty* in Alma Ata. Although the story was crystal clear and scarcely mattered anyway, Miss Intourist insisted on giving me a hoarse running translation. Our neighbours looked as if they would have liked to do her a physical injury and I couldn't blame them.

Back at the hotel the band did its noisy best as we supped off red caviare and vodka. So this was Siberia. This was Kurgan, the gateway to hateful exile "for hundreds and thousands of exiles in Tsarist days" said Miss Intourist. (And for how many since then? I wondered.) Kurgan, where it often gets down to 50 below in winter—but where it's still healthy.

I tried to see in my mind the towns and villages stretching

from here eastwards across the vastness of middle and eastern Siberia, right across to the Bering straits. Here in Kurgan I was only one-third of the way across the territory of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. What were all the other towns like? Like Kurgan? Or like Petropavlovsk?

Trying to cast up a balance-sheet for the people of Kurgan it seemed evident that many things for them now must be better than before 1917. Authority was trying to give them a better life—and succeeding. That repertory theatre was well worth having. The new cinema, too. New hydro-electric plants coming into use. Electricity for “the outlying farms and villas—all will have it by ’56”. Trolley buses, and eventually better roads.

Radio sets—and even if the radio programmes are not a bit to our taste, if you haven’t ever heard a different type of programme they must, I suppose, be acceptable. . . .

But this is only part of the picture. Never forget the primitive housing, the monotonous diet—the eternal soup, the bit of fish, the sunflower oil and the tea—and the fact that the majority of these people not only look like peasants—they *are* peasants, living the lives of peasants. They can’t travel without permission from the police. They can’t change their jobs without someone else’s permission. They may get ordered to go to the Virgin Lands project whether they like it or not.

And it can’t be much fun to know that if you arrive twenty minutes or more late for work twice in one week or three times in one month you face punishment to the tune of being confined up to six months in the factory compound. You live there for six months, never going home, never being allowed to see your wife or children. But it may be a relief to know that, whereas in Stalin’s time leaving one’s job without permission was a criminal offence, nowadays it is only a civil offence.

The USA abolished slavery in 1866. Today she is busy improving the economic lot of the Negro. A Negro driving his own big Cadillac is nowadays a common sight. The Tsars abolished serfdom in 1861. Today the Communists are trying to improve the economic lot of the peasants. But I never saw any peasants driving Zim cars about—or even Pobiedas, their own or anyone else’s.

Next morning bright sunshine, and off we go on a tour of town. Enter Ludmilla Philimonova, our local guide. She is a slightly haggard blonde in her middle thirties with good eyes and a pretty profile. She was dressed in what Kurgan regarded as the height of fashion (not many could aspire to it), a small red hat with tiny golden stars, a badly cut two-piece blue suit (no waist, and coming down in a great tent over the hips), kaprons, wedge shoes, a red blouse with its collar spread out lavishly over the jacket of the suit, and a red plastic bag, with long off-the-shoulder handle. (This was the latest thing, a general issue from Moscow, and definitely what the smart girl should wear. All who could afford one carried one.)

She and Miss Intourist were taken aback when I said that I would prefer to walk, and in truth Ludmilla's wedges were not too well adapted to any long walks. Anyhow, off we set. Ludmilla is divorced and has one child aged seven. She spent four years in Moscow and sighs in reminiscent wonder at its glories. When I artlessly asked if she had enjoyed it, I got an indignant "Of course. Who would not?" She makes 800 roubles (about £23) a month and for once there was no talk of bonuses or prizes.

I questioned her about her job. It sounded nebulous and I surmised that she was a Party official just generally keeping an eye on things. What she said was, "I am responsible for the efficiency of the local theatrical productions". What was that again? "It is for me to ensure that our repertory company productions attain certain standards of technical excellence". But isn't that the job of the producer? Perhaps you *are* the producer? "No, I am not the producer. I inspect the efficiency." Well, I said, is it perhaps your task to ensure that the various productions stay as closely as possible to the official Communist Party line? "Such is not my task." She did not seem to be especially high-powered, but had the metallic manner and mask-like expression of a true Communist.

I asked her about the deep open ditches at the sides of so many of Kurgan's streets. Were they not a hazard on a murky night? "It is necessary for the new sewage"—but obviously no work had been done on these ditches for months past. Over to the museum, which long ago was a church. The

"manager" is a pleasant man, tall, quiet-voiced, handsome (the male Russian voices are in pleasant contrast to the assertive, harsh voices of the women). "Four years ago we have not a single paved street in the whole town." We find ourselves in the natural history part of the museum and, my eye falling on a stuffed exhibit, I start chatting about wolves and bears.

The manager says yes, these are both about still, and if you kill a wolf and bring back its pelt you can collect a worthwhile prize. But he adds that in these days it is rather old hat to mention these animals—they belong to the past. Again I am put in my place—as I was when I admired the native market in Uzbekistan, and when I unthinkingly told a Foreign Affairs Ministry official in Moscow that I wanted to see Tashkent and Bokhara because there was an "exotic tradition" attached to them. "Exotic?" echoed the official, wrinkling his lip, "This we do not like". In the bright lexicon of the new Soviet set-up there is no room for the exotic or the traditional.

Anything that reminds of "the old Russia" is anathema. But even for the Soviets there are certain anomalies. The beautiful things to be seen in the Kremlin museum are all from the old Russia. So, at the end of the four-hour tour, the guide turns round and makes a little speech, winding up with the assertion that it is thanks to the enlightened policy of the Soviet Government that the contents of the museum are available for inspection. . . .

In the Kurgan museum we get another uproarious phrase. Kurgan lies in the middle of an area swarming with lakes, rivers and streams. In consequence waterfowl and wild geese exist in millions. It seems that experiments in cross-breeding are in progress—"the mixed christening of the birds, as you say". I asked for some perfectly innocuous agricultural figures, but this was greeted with shocked surprise and compressed lips. (In Baku when I asked the guide for the latest figures of Soviet oil production she behaved almost as though I had made a pass at her.)

From the museum over to the local park of C. and R., where little boys with shaven heads and little girls with pigtailed looped in exactly the same way that they are looped everywhere in this country, strolled among the lilacs—lilacs which

were rather out-gunned by the red banners and huge cut-outs of Stalin and Lenin.

At the Pioneers' Palace there was a pause while we waited for the administrator to be fetched. There could be no question of our being allowed past the threshold otherwise, and we were watched closely by scowling guardians until the administrator came. I am afraid that this was one of the places where I gave umbrage, as I refused to see all of it. But I felt that I had had my fill because that was where I was given the detailed account of every Russian legend as we slowly inspected the murals on the walls of the tots' nursery. . . .

At lunch a man, one of two sitting at the next table, came across and said something to me. He was blond and youngish and had three campaign ribbons in a celluloid case on the jacket of his brown civilian suit. Finally he went through the gestures of lighting and smoking a cigarette, whereupon I said, "Don't smoke—sorry" loudly in English. Miss Intourist gave him one of her cigarettes with rather obvious reluctance, and when he had gone back to his table, she pointed out to me with a frown that he had a full box of cigarettes in front of him. Then why had he come to ask me for one?

"Because he wishes perhaps to make your acquaintance out of curiosity. He is seeing that you are a foreigner."

"Oh, then let us by all means have him over."

"It is not necessary. He is being only curious."

That night we take off for Moscow. There is a three-and-a-half-hour wait at Sverdlovsk, formerly Ekaterinburg, on our way. Sverdlovsk was one of the places I was refused permission to stay in; the authorities are capricious about these things.

There are one or two notices in English in the corridors, but here again I am discreetly and courteously under surveillance, with airfield "managers" and various other people hanging around. We sup in a large alcove, protected from the main part of the restaurant by a blue plush curtain. And on the long table (it is set for twenty, so there is plenty of room), I see once more the all-too familiar standard cut-glass drinking sets, cut-glass water jugs, cut-glass goblets, cut-glass tumblers—some mauve, some dark blue, some deep purple. "Are they



not beautiful?" says Miss Intourist. "They come from my native Leningrad."

Afterwards we sat outside for a bit, until Miss Intourist complained of the cold wind. I told her to run along but she looked so genuinely cold and so manifestly unhappy at the idea of leaving me unwatched in an airport that I took pity and accompanied her into the VIP waiting-room. There it was in all its glory—and at first heavily tenanted. But the tenants leaped to their feet and almost ran out, with apologetic smiles. They were Soviet aircrews who were resting there between flights, decent-looking pilots, dowdy stewardesses and the rest of them. But the instant that a foreigner needed the room, even if there was only one of him—and he certainly wouldn't have minded their staying on—out they had to get.

It's a big waiting-room this. A huge leather-covered couch. A vast circular table in the middle, with—need I say?—a plush cloth. An outsize, handsome new radio set on which we try to catch a news programme but can only encounter singing, brown plush hangings over the doorway. A great big wardrobe in one corner (can it ever be used? Who keeps the key? There are wardrobes like this in all VIP waiting-rooms in Soviet airports). Big overstuffed chairs, and along one wall a row of eight hard armless chairs. Two big oil paintings, one the birch wood in winter, the other a copy of one of the master-portraits of Stalin.

Plush for the foreigner. VIP waiting-rooms for the capitalist. Huge chairs, soft couches and solitude for the potential spy. What an odd world the Soviets provide. The foreigner, the dangerous man, the man who is an enemy of the people—most likely. And yet always given the best of everything, treated with deference, provided immediately with the best tickets for the ballet and the theatre—tickets which the ordinary Soviet citizen would have to wait weeks to obtain.

The foreigner who must be shunned and left alone and kept at arm's length. Put in hotels where the police keep constant guard. Told he can go anywhere he likes, and then furnished with a long list of places he hasn't a chance of ever seeing. The foreigner who is expected—encouraged—to go right to the head of the queue. Who can reclaim his hat and coat at the

## JUST BACK FROM RUSSIA

theatre ahead of anyone else, no matter how many are waiting. The man on whose account sleepy, and understandably indignant, citizens are turned out of their seats up at the front of airplanes (this was done twice for me).

The foreigner who would like to talk to the man who comes over in a friendly way to borrow a cigarette in a restaurant. The foreigner who winds up in a preposterous great waiting-room in an airport all by himself, gazing at yet another piece of plush.

## A Factory in Kharkov

KHARKOV, and time to go out to that famous tractor factory, named Odzenikidze. The two, instead of the one, are awaiting me. For here in Kharkov, ancient capital of the Ukraine, I am attended not by an Intourist guide alone, but also by this curious pock-marked fellow who was introduced to me at the railway station as "the press representative".

Once or twice I try to ask him what paper he works for. He looks amazed. I also try asking the Intourist guide if she can tell me about him. All she says is, "You are from the foreign press. Therefore it seems only right that we should have a press representative here to accompany you."

It might seem right if he spoke a little English, and might seem even right if he appeared to know about newspaper work. At one point we have what is billed as "an interview", with another young man sporting two different cameras, taking pictures. But all that "the press representative" seems to want to know is "your journey here, was it being official?"

Well, I suppose so, I say. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs knew about it, and indeed got permission for it.

"Ah hmm. But is it strictly official?"

"Well, look, I don't know how official you can get. If you mean is my trip being paid for by the Soviet authorities, no. I am paying my own way."

"Just so. It is not being official?"

"It is not being paid for by the Soviet government, no."

So the press representative has a job to do. Where the bee sucks, there sucks he. He takes his duties very seriously. And everywhere he stays close behind me.

I don't know how fast my temper would break if I were to be stationed in the USSR for any length of time. Since I know that my sojourn is only a brief one I can have fun.

I am not being followed but only accompanied. I develop a technique. I am driving along sort of somnolently, sitting in the front seat, next to the chauffeur, not saying much. Behind me are the Intourist guide and this pock-marked press representative.

Suddenly I come awake. I swing round, with glaring eyes, and peer up an alley. I swivel right round and stare backwards. Then, with a nod and a thin-lipped smile, I whip open a huge black notebook (it is one foot high by ten inches wide, and it has my name across the base in gold letterings) and scribble something inside the loose-leafed pages. It shouldn't happen to the most dedicated Communist press representative. What have I seen? What am I noting down? My press representative, after a few episodes like this, gets tautly ready to beat the gun. When I swivel, he swivels faster. When I stare, he stares harder. I have only to move my head a bit (a fly or something) and he is searching for anything significant that I can possibly be going to look at. In Kharkov during my stay, I doubt if we left an avenue unturned or a stone visually unexplored.

But to the tractor factory. On the way we pass a number of other large and important-looking factories. As always I ask the impossible.

"That looks like a very important factory," I say. "What does it make?"

"Please?" (I repeat what I have just said, loudly, and indicating that I don't think she can understand English. This she doesn't like.)

"Ah, just so. Well, it is a big factory."

"I can see that. I asked what it made."

"I do not know what it makes."

"Can you find out for me?"

"Perhaps."

"Thank you."

We go on down the roadway, turn off to the left, and fetch up in front of the tractor factory, the Soviet Union's biggest, apart from the one at Stalingrad. There is a small flowerbed

in front of it. And up on the façade of the building a design which I suppose gives out at night a moving electric picture of a gay tractor.

Up to the boardroom, a great big pompous, green-baized job, with a long table, a huge director's desk, the carved blotter, the spiky gothic-style chair for the boss under the portrait of we all know who.

Statistics. Working models to scale brought across for me to play with. Production now sixty a day, "but it is flexible". It can be speeded up. Present selling price of their tractor is R19,000 (about £1,730).

Workers pay 90 kopeks, say 1s. 7d., per square metre rent. And of course the worker gets hospitals, schools, "middle technical schools", polytechnic institutes, clubs, a sports stadium, all cultural needs. Except for the small rent, "the State gives everything free". Absenteeism? After a great deal of to-ing and fro-ing I get a figure of seven and a half days per worker per year—but only for genuine illness of course.

We go to see the plant. A young woman wearing a fairly smart hat "in charge of the tally of output". She gets R600 (£54) a month. Further along a tatty little girl with a shabby dress and a handkerchief tied over her head gets R800 (£72). Over the walls of all the machine-shops a mass of slogans and pictures of Stalin—and occasionally Mao.

The slogans adjure the workers "to be eternally vigilant against foreign saboteurs" . . . "Don't waste" (a picture of a leering lout, pouring oil over the floor as he allows his attention to be diverted by something else). "Strive to become better qualified. Do not be content with your present post." "Increase production at all costs."

The girl workers stop to chat with one another or with boys quite unconcernedly. One youth, who is in charge of the final process on the assembly line, smokes cigarettes. The drinking fountains are unbelievably filthy. They are the sort where you press a button and bend down to catch the upward-flung spray. But the apparatus is in a pretty loathsome state, filth and rust and neglect.

We pass a group of girls eating lunch—hunks of plain black bread and drinking from bottles of milk. They haven't even

troubled to leave their places at the bench. A nice touch here: green shrubs in pots inside one of these huge noisy hot machine shops; and an old woman watering the things with a spray hose.

The factory grounds are said to cover about thirty or forty hectares. I would judge it to be about three-quarters of a mile long, rough and bare and unattractive. Piles of refuse, broken bricks, weeds, harsh rubbish dumps, baking in the sunshine. The young male workers have tough, hostile, boorish faces. Most of them have their long hair held in hair nets. Perhaps to keep it out of the machinery.

Outside in the lunch hour, the women lie dozing under the trees or near a line of hollyhocks. Staring down at them are the huge pictures of Lenin, Stalin. The graphs, the exhortations, the reminders. The blood-red banners. You think I am being repetitive? But that is the only way I can bring home to you the repetitiousness of the USSR.

If I worked in a place like that, I would hope to go back at night to a fairly decent home. In the USSR, Kharkov division, the home is as sad as the factory.

After we had left the factory we took a quick drive past the "modern" flats of the workers, less than a quarter of a mile away. It was a saddening sight. A slum, festering in the sunshine. The balconies falling to the ground, the rotten cement unable to last.

The blocks of flats stood in bare, hideous surroundings. For when a building is put up in the USSR, you don't bother about its surroundings. You are so pleased that the project itself is finished you just press on to the next task. And so the building stands there in a slough. When summer comes you step out of the front door of your worker's home and take your path across rutted desolation.

Gardens? Pleasant surroundings? Over there is a line of home-made garages for motor-bikes contrived, so it seems, of tinfoil, looking like tool-sheds on allotments. As everywhere I went in the USSR, I see at the ground floor of these new blocks of workers' flats a line of dismal, gaping holes, boarded up.

And what are those? I ask, in Kharkov as in Baku.

"They are to be shops to serve these blocks of flats."

"But the place has long ago been finished," you say, "and it looks awful to see these boarded-up windows. Why are the shops not now going concerns?" Silence.

That afternoon we agree to drive out to a swimming place some miles away from Kharkov. The guide and the "press representative" seem to think that it is time for me to have a little light relaxation.

The three of us went out to the swimming place, the Intourist guide, the MVD man and I. Once we left the main road we were, as usual, on something quite impossible. The car crawled around deep holes, sometimes left the road entirely to seek a way round on the field.

The light was good, hard, clear, crystalline. There were undulating fields and low hills which might almost have been Sussex downs—if only the rest of the countryside weren't so harsh and so eroded. Huge fields of barley and oats. Everything hard and clear and sharp. The outside privies, the orchards, the herds of goats, the infrequent cows.

Here is the swim place. Did I somewhere get told, or even believe, that the Soviets are tidy? This is a desolation of litter. Here is the really terrible aftermath of a bank holiday. But the guide, seeing my look, says, "Please to recall that yesterday was a day of holiday. And—see; only one or two very old men who are attempting to pick up the paper."

I don't care what the explanation is. I was told in Moscow that Soviet crowds were always tidy. Wipe that one off the blackboard.

Big pictures of Lenin and Stalin, after a ragged woman has unlocked the gates and allowed us to pass through the triumphal arch made of wood. We try an open-air restaurant, but there is nothing to buy. And on the tables of the place a filthy litter, chewed bones, empty bottles, scrapped paper cartons.

The whole place is unkempt and drab and unattractive. There are rough, dirty paths by the side of the muddy lake. People hire row-boats and go out over the turgid waters.

Up the hill away from the lakeside are small haystacks and an apple orchard. Through these the old man goes trying to clean up the mess.

Our chauffeur goes in swimming with the spare wheel from

our car round his waist. A man of resource. But it develops that my guide and the MVD man have got orders not to let me out of their sight.

They are taken aback when I say that I have no desire for a dip. They have come all prepared for one. Go ahead, I say, and I settle down to watch one of the scores of games of banging a bladder back and forth among the revellers, that are going on all around me.

It won't do. First the guide slips out of her clothes and, chastely encompassed in a tent of ancient jersey stuff, goes off to dip into the muddy waters. While she does this the MVD man stands within a foot of me, his face twisted into the semblance of one enjoying the fun.

When the guide returns, the MVD man in turn whips off his top dressing, to reveal a manly form, well equipped with trunks and vest and so forth, of the kind that get into folds. Off he goes, having first ascertained that the guide is keeping a close watch on this non-bathing Britisher.

After nearly two hours, enjoying myself in the sun, I wondered vaguely where the other two had got to. I looked first to one side, then the other. Then I raised myself up on an elbow and glanced behind me. The guide and the MVD man were standing bolt upright within a few inches of me.

Said the guide: "Meester MacColl, you seem to enjoy looking at this game. Do you wish to participate?"

"No," I said. "Just looking." And I settled down to watch the innocent fun for another hour. While our chauffeur took off again with a colossal splash, the spare tyre snugly round his waist.



## A Lovely Day in Tashkent

TASHKENT, a lovely day, and an ancient, painstaking waiter who brings vodka, a rich soup, a cauliflower head wrapped in a napkin, half a bottle of Uzbek wine and some Turkish coffee up to my room.

Tashkent, which not so long ago was forbidden territory, together with nearby Bokhara and Samarkand. At this time of the year (mid-May) the climate is delightful. The Uzbeks in their native costume with the characteristic embroidered skull-caps, are a jolly and courteous people. The town is packed with trees and parks and it is a pleasure to stroll about the leafy boulevards.

The Afghan border is only an hour away to the south by fast plane and the little policeman directing traffic could have blown in from Peking only yesterday, so Mongolian are his features.

General Chernaev conquered this region for imperial Russia in the eighteen-sixties. The Russians built a European town for themselves, and the Uzbeks, several hundred thousand of them, were strictly confined to their own native city on the far side of a deep ravine.

Today Communism is hard at work knocking down mosques, rooting out the mudhuts, pushing big new roads through what was once a city of the Orient. The uniformity of Communism has settled down on top of the Uzbek culture. They still wear their native dress—but there among them are the familiar blue-capped MVD men, the familiar blue trolley-buses, the familiar cut-glass water jugs, and the familiar desk lamps. And they sing of the Five Year Plan in the same breath as love. In the museum are superb examples of Uzbek art, beautiful earrings and magnificently worked boxes. Can I buy some examples? But certainly.

## JUST BACK FROM RUSSIA

Next day, a hitch. Seems that after all such things are no longer easy to get. "One must approach the Co-operative." Well, do so, then. Next day, "The Co-operative is not now in a position to be making such things under three weeks."

And the guide, the one who was unable to find out how far away Baku was from Tashkent, and who was so disapproving of the native market, adds complacently, "Such earrings are no longer sought by the people of this region. They prefer Western jewellery." And he leads me hopefully into a shop filled with cheap, mass-produced trash.

The Communist guide's taste and perception (he was a Russian, not an Uzbek) had apparently been so debased that he was totally unable to distinguish between the meretricious and the real. Repeatedly in the museum I would say that I preferred the old-style native pottery to the modern mass-produced imitations. He was amazed that I could tell the difference. "It is astonishing to me that you are being so swiftly able to distinguish. How do you do it?"

And when I said that I wished to buy some native caps he could not understand why I was not satisfied with the factory-produced imitations from a general store with which he at first tried to fob me off, but insisted on going to the native bazaar for the real thing.

In the Tashkent museum we were being shown—with appropriate expressions of revulsion and horror—pictures of "the terrible conditions of the old days, the way in which the rich peoples and nobles have been treating the serfs and poor peoples".

"See here, are being some poor serfs cast into foul donjacks—how you say? no—donjeons, excuse it please—and they are dying here."

I laughed heartily, then explained to the startled guide and museum curator that the picture was a reproduction of one of William Blake's drawings, and that I thought it more than doubtful that he had had the serfs of Tashkent in mind when he executed it.

Later as we surveyed what was going on in the native quarter the guide said, "Of course these peoples are approving of the modernization of their city. When one lives in a slum it is

only from the distance that it is looking picturesque and attractive."

I suppose that in five or ten years nearly nothing will remain of Uzbek art or culture except in the museums. Large areas of the native city have had the mud huts razed. "Here there will be a fine new square, asphalt on all sides. . . . Here the Lenin-Stalin study centre. . . ." Islam quietly dying out, making way for Lenin.

Let us go over to see the Palace of Culture of the textile workers. This is cotton country and a big area of the city is called "Textile Town".

During the drive we chat about the British press. "How is *The Times* regarded in Britain? It has a huge circulation, no?" "Well, no. Compared with some British papers I could name, it has a fairly small circulation. But it is influential." "How is this being possible? How can a paper be influential if it does not have the big circulation?" "*The Times* is read by influential people; it has been known to influence Parliament, Government decision and what not." "This seems very strange. Is *The Times* thought to be fair?" "All British papers try to be fair. *The Times* is generally regarded as judicious and a model of restraint, seeing both sides of the question." "Here in the Soviet Union we do not regard *The Times* as fair. We are seeing sometimes excerpts from it in our own press, and it seems to be a poisonous paper, devoted to polemics and one-sided remarks. It lacks understanding." "I am sure you are wrong." "Excuse it please, but that is how we are seeing the matter."

Here is the Textile Workers' Palace of Culture, a large, heavy, ugly building, complete with banners and slogans. The director is a handsome chap and for a wonder has a slim athletic figure. He is the one who started out as an actor in Moscow, but I couldn't find out how the transition to this job, thousands of miles from the capital, had taken place.

He apologizes for being in his sports shirt, cotton trousers and white tennis shoes. First—this is the inescapable routine—to the reception room for questions. Blue plush on the tables, scarlet plush done up in ruchings about the cornices and doorways. Plush in a climate like this. The chairs and sofas are covered in white dust-sheets, as all over the country.

The furniture here strikes a new high in weirdness—extraordinary combinations of sofas with mirrors set in the wooden backs which rear above them. Also panelling of false marble. (Why false, when the USSR is stiff with real marble?) There is a picture of Lenin out hunting. He is sitting by a camp fire, surrounded by dead rabbits and live friends.

"We have nineteen circles in this Palace of ours," says the director proudly. "We have 400 doctors to look after the 10,000 members. Imbued by the fine spirit of Socialism and driven by the force of combined working, we are affording to these members and their families all sorts of services and facilities—the brass band, the art school, the ballet school, the drama, the cinema, the library. We have too our 'Red Corner', which lovingly studies the thoughts and desires of the many workers.

"Ten million roubles a year are spent on our Palace, all for the education of the people, for they must have many musicians and specialists of arts. The money comes from the Government and the trades unions. The peoples are taught all this free. No subscriptions are necessary. I am reprimanded by the workers if things are not well."

"There are recreational meetings—a good Uzbek stakhanovite woman delivered a closely followed lecture to one thousand other peoples, telling them the reasons of how to achieve the same results."

Who do you say reprimanded you? "Oh, the workers have reprimanded me. I was much criticized by the comrades. Workers' conferences are held very often, and there are councils of workers who are quick to criticize. They say to me 'You are someone who does not make the correct installation. You are not perfectly right'. Just so. I receive 3,000 roubles (about £272) a month, and often rewards and good prizes. The State pays for my car. My home telephone I pay for myself. Twice a year I travel to other parts of the USSR to gain new ideas and discuss matters of interest with my colleagues at other Palaces of Culture. My wife is a research worker in philology. Come and see the Palace."

We tramp along past all the gigantic busts of Lenin and Stalin, and the red flags and the rooms full of charts, and the familiar key paintings of L. and S. on the walls, and the director

chatting happily about it all. Repetition—of ideas, of rewards and threats, and pictures. Repetition, repetition—of slogans, and allegations, and words like Peace. Repetition of identical phrases thousands of miles apart—"Rossia is a beeg contree"; "We are a seemple-hearted people"; "Jost write the truth about us".

A radio room. What's in there? "Oh, there we receive the special Moscow broadcasts to be disseminated among the comrades." . . . A roomful of small children, sitting playing draughts, reading, sewing. A small girl leaps to her feet and gives the director a military-style salute as we enter. The display of photographs of workers who have gained praise. Another display of children's photos—"diligent—activist children who are a credit to themselves and their teachers". Grim-faced, shaven-headed little activists.

The director's special joy, because of his original training, is the theatre, seating close on a thousand people. It has a revolving stage and plenty of impressive-looking scenery. But the atmosphere of this whole Palace is strangely like being back at school. I felt like a parent who goes down to his son's school at half-term to see the dorm play being put on, and goes the rounds with the agreeable, urbane house-master.

This was spare-time school for 10,000 adults; this was the Palace which must be their home-from-home. The Palace of busts and pictures and slogans and graphs. Much better for them than hanging about a pub of course. A Palace, where they can criticize the director for not making the correct installations, and can play in the brass band perhaps, and go to the cinema to see a film about a collective farm, and, if they are activists, get their pictures put up on the board and listen to an interesting lecture by an Uzbek stakhanovite. The Palace with a radio room in touch with Moscow so that the special broadcasts can be disseminated among the comrades.

Lucky they.

## To Stalin's Birthplace

TIFLIS, capital of the Georgian SSR. I am awakened in my high-ceilinged bedroom giving on Rustaveli Street (he was Georgia's national poet) by some rather fine singing. I look out. It is a column of MVD troops marching down the middle of the street and singing as they go. I suppose the censor would never let me say that the MVD sings well. If they can't snore or go shopping for oranges or put the score up at a soccer match they probably can't sing either.

This is a genial place. The people are exuberant and offer you a drink if they like the look of you—sometimes send a whole bottle over to your table in a restaurant. The moustache hereabouts reaches a fine frenzy, and you can see the twin brother of Joseph Stalin twenty times in each city block. The street cleaning is done by gaily clad Kurdish women and in the dear dead days there used to be a flourishing German colony, and many French businessmen lived here.

Nostalgic note from my 1893 guide book: "Best hotel in the town is the London Hotel. Proprietor very civil and obliging. At this hotel will be found the excellent guide Rustum, who speaks perfect French. His fee is R3 a day within the town." I certainly wish Rustum was still around—and that three roubles would buy a day's sightseeing. Incidentally my guide book also says: "Without wishing to detract from the merits of the best hotels mentioned in this handbook, it is only right to advise the traveller to be provided, when travelling in Russia, with remedies against insects of a vexatious disposition." Yes, I got vexed that way, and on the train out of Tiflis, too.

There are tangerines growing in Georgia, and there is tobacco and tea grown here too; lemons and plums and grapefruit, and they make the Soviet Union's best wine here in the

Caucasus. The racial strains are as mixed up as the colours in a Fair-isle jersey—everything from Persians to Armenians and Azerbaijanis to Circassians.

Tiflis lies in a narrow slot of a valley between great mountains with snow still on them (early May). It claims to be 1,500 years old and the population is said to be 600,000, although how you can be sure about such things if you don't hold an occasional census is something I don't know. The river Kur, very muddy, sweeps through town, and high bluffs rise from it on each side, with churches, Arab fortresses and so forth sprinkled about.

We are off to Gori, birthplace of Stalin, about sixty miles to the north. We drive along beside the Kur and my guide says it is reputed to be second only to the Nile as regards the amount of sediment it bears along. That explains its appearance. Now we are in a countryside which reminds me of the lower Himalayas. The mountains soar off huge and blue and disdainful and there are vineyards and fields of wild flowers, buttercups and forget-me-nots. Here's Mtskheta, the ancient capital of Georgia and claimed by Georgians to be the oldest city in the world. These days it has rather lost any air of grandeur, but it has received a terrible going over through the centuries, being sacked by all hands from Tamerlane down. Up above the town on a high crag is the sixth-century church of St. Nina, which has become a sort of Georgian trade mark in song, story and picture, like Fujiyama for the Japanese.

In contrast to St. Nina, down below is a hideous hydro-electric dam with a monster statue of Lenin imperiously pointing to the spot where the dam was to be built. Mtskheta goes in for red tin roofs, unfortunately; the houses they cover must become almost unbearable in the summer.

The countryside is wonderful, shining and green, and we keep encountering great flocks of sheep coming down from the hills. They are shepherded by tough-looking customers who remind me of Pathans, tall and wiry and blue-eyed who look as if it would give them the greatest pleasure to spit in your eye. They wore big caps of sheepskin dyed brown.

The hamlets are fierce and unsightly, but the apple and cherry and plum trees are heavy with bloom, and the wheat is

ripening in the fields. In one village they have a bear chained to a post as a general attraction. The guide looks at him. "He is no longer a cub," he says with a smile. "I think that soon in that village they will be eating bear beefsteaks for breakfast."

The guide plies me with questions; he is a pleasant, thin youth who looks far from strong. "Is it true that British cinema showings are continuous?" "Is it true that the American language is rapidly overcoming the British tongue, to the general disgust in Britain?" "Do you have in London film shows that go on all night long, as they do in New York?" "Are not British women revolted by the immodesty of the clothes they are asked to wear?" "Is Scotch visky good? I should like to try it as an experiment." "What is this strange form of orange jam with which all British families have to start their day?" (I tell him that British business men in Moscow irreverently refer to caviare as "fish jam". Also, as we pass a well-guarded bridge, that a Russian back in Moscow explained the bridge guards to me like this: "It takes 20,000 man-hours to build a bridge—and only ten man-seconds to destroy it." And that one girl who worked in a Western embassy genuinely thought that "Si chass"—which means "In a jiffy"—meant "Come back again next week" because every time she heard the expression in a shop the assistant never came back again.)

Stalin's cottage at Gori is a modest little building, but it has been enclosed by a pretentious pillared temple in an attempt to transform it into a shrine. The cottage by itself would be far more impressive and dignified. Three wooden steps lead up to a worn wooden verandah. Stalin, his mother and father, all managed in a single tiny room, containing a couch, a painted wooden chest, a smaller bread chest, two small cupboards for bedclothes and crockery, and a table on which rests a brass samovar with a tiny china teapot on top and a circular mirror in a carved frame.

"Comrade Stalin, the leader of the progressive humanity, lived in this house from 1879 to 1883," intones the guide. "The family lived most modestly. They had no means to have a flat of their own so they rented this room." Downstairs was a



cellar, and the landlord lived in the only other room. The Stalin museum, next to the cottage, is a surprisingly negligible affair, containing almost nothing of note—a few photos, a bad oil painting or two, some trashy presents given to him by Bulgarians and Chinese on his seventieth birthday. Somewhere there must be a big fund of Staliniana; perhaps a new Stalin museum will go up in Moscow, on the same scale as the Lenin one there.

Outside the Stalin cottage I asked the MVD man if he would pose for a picture against the doorway, but when this request was translated I got back one of the bleakest looks that ever came my way.

In the little town itself the monuments and “palaces” and bulldozers of Communism are there in profusion where pilgrims used to come to see the Church of the Assumption and the jewelled gifts of Justinian the Great. “Here will be Marx-Lenin-Stalin Centre”, “Here the Engineering Centre”, “Here the new offices of the local Soviet”, “Here statue of great Stalin five metres high composed of granite”, “Here the gathering place of the workers”—on it goes, the litany of Russia 1954.

We lunch out on a sunswept mountainside. The Tiflis hotel has provided a picnic, a bottle of wine, a cold chicken. It is very pleasant and peaceful but I unwittingly offend the young guide. For I say to him casually that at this year’s meeting of the Supreme Soviet Malenkov joked informally with Politburo men around him, and this was commented on by my colleagues permanently stationed in Moscow as a change from Stalin’s day. Stalin, I add, was always formal on such occasions, unbending and inclined to insist on protocol. I see I have said the wrong thing; the young man instantly resents even so small an implied criticism of Stalin and comes to his deceased leader’s defence with rather heated words. I see that he is genuinely incensed and I rather like him for it. I calm him down and all is quickly well again.

Why was Beria shot? “He was responsible for those episodes which took place in East Berlin on June 17th of last year. All that was his doing. He merited execution.” Hmm. I wonder if Beria was still alive on June 17th last year?

This young man of Georgia produced one of the best remarks of the tour. As we ended our meal a stray cat approached, a scrawny miserable-looking creature, and I threw it the bones of our chicken. It fell upon the feast and broke later into a crescendo of grateful purrs. "And so," said my guide, "the lucky cat is in the seventh sky!"

We went to the ballet in Tiflis, a tremendous affair, pulsating with energy and gusto and dash. The men all leaped about as though they'd just had jumbo shots of adrenalin, and the girls were not far behind them. But I noticed again, as I had in Moscow, that just about the loudest applause of all comes not for the dancing but for the scenic effects. *Lepinskaya* receives applause—but the scene where the house burns down or the sea sweeps over the stage or the demon king in *Swan Lake* changes the beautiful princess to a swan before our very eyes is what the audience really appreciates.

An unexpected touch about the ballet is that the Russian equivalent of bobby-soxers go charging down the centre aisle at the interval and cheer and clap madly by the footlights, as close as they can get to their curtain-call-taking heroes and heroines.

In Moscow I visited the ballet school, the second oldest in the country (1773) after Leningrad's. Pupils join at ten and keep at it for nine years, getting a high-school education as well as learning their steps; also training in music and the other arts. They are given a diet which is the equivalent of a heavy manual worker's.

Applications to join run at about five hundred a year, but only thirty get accepted, fifteen of each sex. All are placed in jobs when they finish the course, the lucky ones at the Bolshoi or Stanislavsky theatres in Moscow, the others in the provinces.

Three per cent don't last till the end. For the senior boys and girls there is a stipend of R200 (£18) a month, and all get free ballet slippers and free annual visits to "rest homes". Hours 9 to 5. No fees for dancing—once you're accepted, the dancing lessons are free. When they get jobs their starting pay is a minimum of R980 (£90) a month. If you rise to be a star you can eventually make five or six thousand roubles (£454-£545) a month—plus all sorts of perquisites.

## JUST BACK FROM RUSSIA

I wonder whether the girls get picked partly for their looks and figures or whether the life and training of a ballet dancer produce beauty. It was noticeable that these young girls were much superior in looks—facially as well as bodily—to the run-of-the-mill Russian women.

The little boys too looked very handsome and healthy—and earnest. One of the youngest of all already had the ballet dancer's "mask" face to a remarkable degree. There is an "international section" at the school where applicants from all republics of the USSR and from "The New People's Democracies" are made welcome. We sat and watched a North Korean girl do a Spanish castanet dance, but this was poor. On the other hand the straight ballet excerpts we were shown seemed supremely good. And I was asked: "Is it true that British ballet dancers take Russian names in an effort to deceive the public?"

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### . . . And Back to Moscow

LENIN'S museum is just around the corner from his tomb. It's a big place and about 3,000 Soviet citizens a day go the rounds there and on Sundays 5,000. You feel you know him pretty well by the time the two hours or more are up, for Lenin had an uncommon, rather Mongolian face and the place is thick with pictures and photos of him.

Our guide here (at the equivalent of £117 a month) is a quick, intelligent woman, a graduate with honours in modern history. She maintains a machine-gun stream of words and is never at a loss. As we pause to examine one of his early "gymnasium" (school) reports which reveals that young L. was docked five marks for inattention in his maths form, she says indulgently, "Perhaps the young dreamer already was thinking of his great life's work?"

On August 30th, 1918, a certain Madame Kaplan made a determined effort to change the course of history, but her aim proved poor. At point-blank range she fired four revolver shots at Lenin. Two missed, the third winged him in the left arm, and the fourth cracked his shoulder-blade as he instinctively turned aside.

Her intended victim was wearing a trim double-breasted grey overcoat of excellent cloth, with black velvet trimmings at the collar—the sort of coat that you would have expected a capitalist to wear, although why he felt the need of such a garment in August is a bit of a mystery. Perhaps he wore it as protection on a hunch? The two bullet holes in the coat are picked out with touches of vivid scarlet thread. What happened to Madame K? "She died in prison."

(I always thought that it was the recollection of this episode that induced reluctance to travel on the part of the Communist

leaders or expose themselves more than necessary to the public gaze, and not overwork.)

At the age of five Lenin wore white knickerbockers. Lenin père had a very stern demeanour in this family group, a Mister Barrett of the Wimpolski Prospekt. His mother was a rather handsome woman with perceptive eyes, and, wearing that little indoors headgear fashionable the world over at that time, she contrives to look just like our own mid-Victorians, like the pictures in the Tretyakov Art Gallery.

Here are the books young L. perused in school. A title: *What's To Be Done?* Young Lenin knew all right. "He was most fond of it," smiles the guide. And here is his very own copy of Marx's *Das Kapital*, the legendary best-seller by the bearded one who now graces the Highgate Cemetery. It is opened at the fly-leaf. Lenin must have been an unusual boy, no question. *Das Kapital* is not recommended reading for an afternoon in the hammock. Perhaps it would have been better in a way if he'd stuck to Dostoevsky.

Then the years of repeated arrest and exile in Siberia. (Once I asked a Soviet acquaintance just why the Tsarist authorities had not got rid of Lenin and Stalin once for all while they had the chance, and received the reply, given with immense scorn: "They were too cowardly to execute them.")

We see the cottages where Lenin stayed in Siberia, and I hope for his sake it was nothing like Petropavlovsk. Here are some examples of his authorship—thirty-seven volumes from his pen already published and more soon to come, for like Zane Grey he left a wealth of unpublished material when he died. The first editions are given the spotlight treatment—set into the wall behind glass, with red velvet background and marble inscriptions.

Lenin growing up among his bristling-bearded fellow revolutionaries. Lenin the lawyer, the prodigiously productive journalist, keeping as much on the move as a super salesman, which in a way he was. There are eighteen big rooms on two floors for all this—and the red-scarved pioneer boys and girls gape in awe.

Here is the first of many paintings showing Lenin in action: "He influences illegal circles in St. Petersburg," says the guide. Here he is wowing them all in a coffee shop, winning over even that capitalistic-looking doubter in the corner. Here is

a good rabble-rousing speech being put across. Here he is looking at the ticker-tape during the period of foreign intervention, and about to issue a crisp order to the adoring ADC who stands at his elbow.

It is notable that in nearly every portrait of Lenin (and Stalin too) the smile is present. You get the impression that Lenin (and Stalin) were two of the geniallest, good-naturedest, grinningest old revolutionaries who ever breathed. For them, despite all vicissitudes, life was just one grand sweet song.

Marriage. In 1887 he takes as his bride Nadezda Krupskaya, like his mother a schoolteacher. They honeymoon in Siberia, for unfortunately that is where he gets sent back to almost immediately. One of my favourite exhibits in the whole place is a photograph of Nadezda addressing the troops just behind one of the many fronts during the "period of foreign intervention" in 1919. She is a tall woman wearing a striped two-piece suit, and there is something reminiscent of a speech-making suffragette about her. In the foreground sits young Molotov, listening with dogged intentness. For some reason the censors cut out this apparently innocuous description of him that I sent in a cable about the museum: "*His hair is dense and black. He is a glossy, coltish figure, compared with the Molotov of the international wrangling stakes of today.*" Perhaps it must not be said that Molotov ever looked younger than he does now? The guide stares at him and clasps her hands: "Ah, how I wish that he could be as young as that now—Russia needs men like him." "He is very well-known abroad too," I reply.

What have we here? The first editions of *Pravda* (*Truth*) newspaper, so small, so archaic-looking, so yellowing. And look what it has become today. Lenin's newspaper, even though he has been dead these past thirty years, keeps my colleagues of the Moscow press corps up night after night, waiting for its first editions. *Pravda*, which nowadays is the Voice of the Kremlin; *Pravda*, which is displayed by order in all those hundreds of thousands of glass cases, on the station platforms, and along the sides of the streets, and in public squares, and in the parks.

That first issue sold 40,000 copies, which wasn't bad going for a clandestine paper. "But oh, how the Tsarist police persecuted it!" (my guide). But not enough, apparently.

Lenin's first newspaper of all was called *Sparks* and, said the guide, Lenin pointed out that: "From *Sparks* may well develop fires."

July 1917, and Kerensky's provisional government is in power. Once again Lenin is on the run, and this time he hides out in a small cottage near Petrograd, as Leningrad was then called. So here are Lenin's cooking pot, and the tea kettle, the saw, the metal drinking cup, and the khaki greatcoat which was more appropriate than that velvet-collared job in which Madame Kaplan embedded her bullets later.

And now victory. Kerensky has fled to Britain, the same Britain that Marx sought.<sup>1</sup> And so the earnest small boy in the knickerbockers who lost five marks for inattention is in. He has scaled the peaks of power.

The climax of the show is the reproduction of Lenin's office in the Kremlin. The visitors goggle at this from behind a rope. There it all is. You can almost see Lenin sitting there. Four big leather-covered armchairs are drawn up beside a red baize-covered table making that familiar T with his desk. (Perhaps Lenin started that vogue? But why did they not stick to baize instead of plush?)

Says the guide: "But Comrade Lenin never sat on the soft chairs there, but always on the hard. The soft ones were reserved for the visitors."

There's a green-shaded desk lamp and also four candles. Candles—why? "Because in those days, those far-off days, there were occasionally cuts in the electricity supply. But principally to moisten Comrade Lenin's sealing-wax."

"See the dictionaries, and see the books on politics and history." (A small boy who reads *Das Kapital* at school isn't going to change his tastes.) There are occasional tables, and swing-around document containers. A wooden ashtray shaped

<sup>1</sup> Interesting to listen to Soviet Russians talking about these two episodes. Marx in Highgate is fine—and the navy men of the battleship *Sverdlovsk*, who arrived in Spithead for the Coronation Review, paid their dutiful respects in Highgate, as part of a motor-coach tour. But Kerensky? *He* fled to a capitalist hide-out. What was Britain thinking about to afford him sanctuary? To a Soviet citizen any sort of Liberal tradition of regarding all sanctuary-seeking men as alike is ridiculous. The only proposition in the USSR is this: "Are you for us?" If you say that you are keeping an open mind, that is terrible. The worst sin in Soviet Russia is objectivity—if objectivity means criticism of the Soviet point of view.

like a meerscham pipe. A red ornamental carpet. And—so *that's* who gave them their popularity—carved wooden hand blotters.

His despatch case was fashioned of wood, like nearly all of Russia's buildings. But it had decorated metal trimmings along its edges. On his desk were two old-fashioned, teed-up telephones at his left hand, and every time a call came into the Kremlin for him, a desk lamp housed in a remarkable meringue-shaped, clouded-glass container glowed briefly.

And the room, so help me, is dominated—by what? By a huge potted palm. So that is why my bedroom in far-off Petropavlovsk had a faithful imitation?

Yes, you can almost see Comrade Lenin sitting there, having long since erased the temporary slur of five marks lost for inattention.

I find, on turning up my files, that there was another censorship cut in this story. I wound it up like this (*italics* again for what the censors cut):

"Lenin hadn't much time for anything except pushing forward his ideas. Those ideas that have changed the world we live in quite a bit. A shrewd, dynamic, implacable man—with ideas, who wore velvet collars on his coat and founded *Pravda* and knew, or was pretty sure he knew, just what was right for a nation of 200 millions—and lots of other people besides.

*"A carefully patterned blueprint for living—including palms in pots, red carpets, carved hand blotters, collective farms, thirteen hundred roubles a month for a museum guide—that sort of thing was what the little boy who once wore white knickerbockers produced."*

Then the censors allowed me a last phrase: "And facing him, as he sat at his desk in the Kremlin, was a florid oil painting of Marx. Old Man Marx, of the luxurious beard. Chap who lies there in Highgate cemetery."

But then they cut this last line: *"Chap who may be said to have touched off this whole unlikely project."*

The last stop in the museum is in a room devoted to Lenin's death. A banner-hung room, a sense of catafalques; photographs of those doing reverence at his bier.

Says the guide: "This makes us very sad. An untimely demise, no?"



## Farewell to the Metropole

WHEN I finally won the battle about my hotel and moved out of the Metropole into the National the window of my new bedroom gave straight on to the little road which goes up to Red Square. This road runs up a steepish hill and at its top and just over the crest I could see the Lenin-Stalin Mausoleum. On the right are the attractive walls and towers of the Kremlin. On the left is the ugly Historical Museum. And down below my window, on every day it was allowed, there took place the fascinating spectacle of Moscow life, the queue to see the two dead leaders. It does not matter how hard it is raining, it does not matter how hot the summer gets: the people queue, rain or shine, to see the two corpses.

I have seen people getting soaked under a fierce downpour, their rolled-up copies of *Pravda* held above them as disintegrating umbrellas, but never dreaming of leaving the queue. I have seen them running, like contestants in a hundred-yards race, in fierce heat, simply to close ranks as they came round the corner from the Kremlin gardens and turned the corner up the hill.

I have seen them all, women, men and children, old peasants, perfectly prepared to give a sign of the cross to these two men who could do nicely without God; young soldiers, whole families, schoolgirls, Muscovites, people from the farthest ends of the Soviet Empire, heaven knows who. And what brings them here with their intent persistence?

It could be vulgar curiosity. It could be genuine veneration—or morbid interest in mummies. It could be anything. But the fact is that there is always that thick, broad, eager queue, edging up or rushing up to see. The greatest show on earth, Moscow version, consists of two men who some time ago left the earth.

They lie there side by side. One died thirty years ago. The other only last year. They have affected the lives of us all, these two who now lie stiffly side by side in the red and grey marble mausoleum.

We are standing here at the head of the queue, and behind us, round the corner and out of sight, goes the line of people. The normal bustle and roar of traffic goes on all about us, and at the great state-run department store, slap opposite the tomb, on the other side of Red Square, our queue of adulants has its counterpart in a great queue of shoppers.

Five minutes before admission time the policeman at the head of our queue starts his slow and measured progress across the cobblestones of Red Square, and we all shuffle after him at what is deemed a seemly rate. When the five minutes are done we have come up to the great bronze doors of the tomb, flanked by huge red-draped wreaths. There is a pause while the guard is changed (four times an hour). Three *wooden-faced* ("wooden-faced" censored) young soldiers, with fixed bayonets, move up, marching the "parade step", in which each foot is slammed down on the ground as hard as possible. Over there is the architectural fantasy of St. Basil, with its standing-room-only, gooseberry-shaped Oriental spires. Since the revolution St. Basil's has been a museum, and as I glance round at the line of people behind me, their faces rapt and tense, I get the impression that for some of them—the majority perhaps—this mausoleum and the mortal remains within must have taken the place of the churches and the cathedrals of pre-revolutionary times.

I step out of the sunshine and into the air-conditioned dusk of the interior. A hammer-and-sickle medallion, worked in silver, twinkles against the dark marble background. An officer motions me to the left and I am walking down a flight of marble steps into the subterranean tomb itself.

Now I turn to the right and there, each sharply spotlighted in an otherwise dim little chamber, lie the two makers of twentieth-century history. They lie on separate catafalques with bronze banners and bronze flowers as adornment. The bodies are encased in glass so finely polished as to be all but invisible. At the four corners of the sunken rectangle

containing the catafalques stand young Red Army men, facing inwards.

I mount three or four steps so that I am looking down at Lenin and Stalin from a distance of a few feet. The lighting is admirable and the features of the dead men stand out in sharp clarity. Lenin wears a black shirt, with outside breast pockets. His arms lie outstretched and the right fist is clenched. The left hand lies open and the square strong fingers are noticeable. There are a couple of rows of ribbons on his shirt. Both bodies are covered with thick shrouds from the waist downwards and lengths of black crêpe are cast at their feet.

Lenin's head is neat. The upslanting eyes of the pictures and photographs are a notable characteristic. From certain angles the hint of a smile seems to play about his lips. A certain sardonic enjoyment over all the fuss he has caused? Perhaps that smile in his portraits was a fact. Certainly he seems to smile in death.

Stalin is more austere. He wears a military tunic, banked with a profusion of ribbons. His face is much gaunter than I had bargained for, and marked with care and responsibility. It is an impressive face, the grey hair brushed back and the familiar grey moustache drooping below the prominent nose.

In death the two form an absorbing visual contrast. Lenin the lawyer, with his high cheekbones and bald head; the brilliant advocate, the planner, the man who "influenced illegal circles in St. Petersburg". Stalin the doer, the man of action, the man who was trained for the priesthood. The man who could easily have been a Jesuit. But instead was something quite different.

I pause a little in mid-shuffle, and turn my head sideways to try to see a little more of Stalin's face and expression. At once comes a peremptory whisper from the watching MVD officer: "Walk on, comrade; walk quickly on."

It is the law of compensation, I suppose. Almost no one, out of this nation of 200 millions, ever managed to get a glimpse of these two while they lived. So now, in death, they make up for lost time. In life they were too busy to let their public see them.

In death they have all the time in the world.

## Is Religion for the Very Old?

KIEV, a handsome, stylish sort of place—"the Jerusalem of Russia"—which perches up on an immensely high bluff and luxuriates in views of the 1,000-mile-long Dnieper river; Kiev, the city of churches and monasteries, which are maintained nowadays as rather down-at-heel sideshows.

Church and State did a deal under Stalin. The Church had been quietly licking its wounds after the great anti-clerical purges of the early days of Bolshevism. When Hitler attacked Russia the Church urged all-out support of Stalin in his fight against the Nazis. In return Stalin adopted a live-and-let-live policy towards the Church. The printing press on which the Godless League used to print its newspapers was seized and handed over to the Church.

Today all religions are tolerated inside the USSR—tolerated in the way in which an old horse is put out to grass for its last years.

Young Communists will tell you: "Religion? In about another twenty years it will be dead in Russia. It is for the very old only. No one else believes in this."

It is hard to see how they can be wrong. Whenever I visited an "operating" church or monastery I saw only old peasants at worship, men and above all women, with seamed, lined faces. At Zagorsk, a well-known "holy city" near Moscow, I searched the packed congregation on Palm Sunday with my eyes; it was an overwhelmingly elderly congregation—and a peasant one.

A trickle of young men still enters the priesthood, but the majority of the orthodox priests too are old and have about them a hopeless, rather pathetic air. Many of them are handsome, striking figures, with their great beards and lustrous eyes, but

they look like men going through the motions without a great deal of conviction.

They must sometimes fall into near despair at the knowledge that the children of the Soviet Union are all being brought up in total ignorance of Christian fundamentals, taught that religion is "the opiate of the masses", an oldfashioned form of superstition. And when they contemplate their fast-dwindling congregations, with only the old coming any longer to worship, and the knowledge that in another few decades there may, as the young Communists smilingly declare, be no congregations left at all.

No, there is no longer any persecution of the Church in Russia—it is unnecessary. That only some churches are "operating" is a further psychological blow. Is the church down that street still a place of worship—or a museum, or a storehouse or a shop? This debasing of religious structures is a depressing thing to see and is a constant reminder that what religion is left is only a remnant—there on sufferance.

In Kiev I got the worst interpreter of my entire stay. Later it turned out that his speciality was in reality Chinese, and that he had only been brought in to help me as the result of a last-minute emergency. We could each understand only a fragment of what the other said, and his brand of English reminded me of a deliberately scrambled telephone conversation.

We come upon a shattered monastery. "Nemetskis, Germans flew it up when is war being. Oh, excuse, please, you are correctly saying in the British that the Germans have *flew*ed it up."

He gathers himself together for a supreme effort as we go to see the catacombs of St. Anthony. Here are dismal beggars, and a large crowd of the devout—nearly all peasant women, who kneel outside the little church in the sunshine as an overflow congregation. In the old days this shrine drew nearly a quarter of a million pilgrims a year; they came great distances, taking months on the journey.

"Ah good, so now we enter caveys," cried the guide, a good-natured grin on his face beneath the close-cropped hair. "Caveys interesting, old, are being deep. Here see priest blessing womens. We no trespassing yet, trespassing in little

times. This very notorious holy place, notorious through Russia."

A bearded father stood guard over the little candles, and men and women leaving the church ran to kiss his hand. Some clung to his hand, staring up at him and murmuring to him anxiously. He replied wearily, almost abruptly, I thought, and the blessings he and the other priests administered seemed mechanical, perfunctory even.

"Now is times for trespass, wait a mo, here this ways, you may trespass."

We take each our candle and enter a narrow passage in the pitch-black limestone cave. I have to duck, for the passage isn't much more than six feet high and my shoulders just about brush against each wall simultaneously as I edge along. It is cold and dank, and around me in the dusk there is a constant scuttering and whispering and the sound of huge kisses as the peasant women kneel and salute the dead saints.

We are sixty feet down in the mysterious world of anchorites and holy men who chose voluntary imprisonment in these forbidding cells. The peasant women are transformed. They dart eagerly at the glass-topped coffins where the tiny bodies of the saints—of which everything is concealed excepting an occasional clay-coloured hand—lie huddled in rich and vivid vestments in the niches along the way.

My man is no whit impressed by the surroundings. He has a bull-like voice that is loud even in a busy street above ground. Down here it reverberates and deafens. I try, just as I did with the running commentaries in the ballet and the cinema, to restrain the flood a little, pointing to the worshipping women, and laying my finger on my lips. To no purpose; his job is to tell me about it. He does.

We wander along amid the frescoes and little altars, the bodies, the beautiful vestments and the kisses. Whenever we come upon a shrine in which the hand is showing, several women are sure to nudge us and hold their candles up so that we can get a better view of the hand.

"He—how you say—is being the big saint. Tall saint? No, big saint. Did he be torturing in No. 10—excuse, please, No. 12 century. After No. 10 he comes No. 12? Oh, it is not

so? Is coming No. 11. Is No. 11, yes, please. Here the Archivi, see big hat. Yes, yes, yes, yes. Is being religious. Here see window; is being junior office where one holy mens have being lived in this junior office for two hundred yahrs." I give him a look and shake my head. "No, no, no, no!" he roars, smiling, while the startled worshippers look round to see what the uproar is about. "Of course, not 200 yahrs, is being *twenty* yahrs! Correct? Please tell me about all my mistakes, very grateful if could learning.

"This holy mens he did working hard along the monastery. Big monastery changes is being working. Gold here by side is working in gold on coffin showing images."

A peasant woman implants another kiss. "Ah, humbleness peasant woman, to see her—old style—is kissing relics. Again! The kisses are two. She old, see. Youth no interesting in religion. Youth is not wasting time kissing relics. But is none persecuting. All going quietly."

In Kharkov I had a look at the Soviet children. Children in Russia have a great time of it—theatres of their own, parks of their own, palaces of their own. Early on they have to get to learn to do without their mothers to a much greater extent than the children of other countries. For the majority of Soviet married women have jobs—if you do not you are in danger of being dubbed a drone—and as soon as the early months are out of the way the tots are left in a crèche or day nursery to allow the mother to resume working.

"We have abolished unemployment among women," is one of the proudest claims in the USSR. But this has its drawbacks, drawbacks from the Western point of view. For the influence of the mother is weakened by the crèche and day-nursery system. The child quickly gets into the feel of communal life, and used to being handled by strangers in authority.

I must confess to the old-fashioned view about children, and It was therefore with a slight sinking of the heart that I agreed to go out to visit a Children's Railway just outside Kharkov. Children were sure enough in charge of the whole affair, with some slight overseeing from a grizzled old railway worker who ticked off a small boy, who was slow in coupling an engine, with what sounded like some praiseworthy saltiness.

It was all very serious. The moppets in their uniforms as conductors and ticket-collectors and station-masters, with shut-in little faces. Saluting gravely when introduced, and going through all the flag-wagging and whistling and tooting with solemn precision.

Nothing light-hearted here; they were running a real railway, these boys and girls, and determined to do it efficiently. When I started to take a photograph of one boy, he hastened across to consult his little colleagues as to what angle to put his hat at.

The girl who came through the train (the locomotive was made in Budapest and was about one-third the size of an ordinary engine) to collect tickets frowned when informed that I was travelling free and looked as though she was about to give the Intourist guide an argument on the point.

Another girl ran the waiting-room with unsmiling severity. And when we drove out to a young Pioneers' holiday camp (children of the tractor plant workers) we found again this unsmiling attitude and determination not to let the rules be flouted.

For our chauffeur ignored the place where he should have parked and continued to drive on slowly into the depths of the camp, near to the administration buildings. At once a number of small boys came rushing out signalling to us to stop. They could have been only about ten or eleven years old, but they glared at us—us the grownups smiling in propitiating manner from the back—and asked us peremptorily just what we thought we were up to.

"You can go no further," they repeated. "It is the order." The Intourist guide and even the MVD man—for this was where I had the constant escort of "the press representative"—argued and pled. The boys stood their ground without deference, shaven-headed and tightlipped.

Finally some older boys were fetched, and when they had made quite sure that the camp manageress was indeed expecting us, said we could pass. It was a Sunday and the place was full of parents visiting the children. They sat about with them in quiet little groups, and when the manageress passed near a group all—parents as well as children—would rise politely.



This manageress was an imposing woman, huge, genial in a restrained sort of way, and with great poise and self-possession. She reminded me of the *commères* they have at concerts and similar entertainments in the USSR, all on the amazon side, all with a deliberation of manner, and a bold, firm gaze to quell the evildoer. They might almost be turned out on an assembly line somewhere.

There was a committee who went the rounds with us, oldish, greying men who seemed cowed by the impressive manageress. They wore Ukrainian-type blouses and kept together in a little group at our heels. The manageress with many a fruity gesture told me that 570 children were in her care, and they all one day hoped to be workers at the tractor plant.

The children seemed well behaved to the point of restraint, with an almost adult gravity and watchfulness. Here I could see taking shape the earnest women and glum men of the next generation of Soviet citizens. Our inspection, of course, was one of those saturation-point affairs. I cannot be allowed to rest content with just one of the dormitories—every last one of them has to be unlocked to enable me to poke my head in at the same vista of tightly-packed but clean beds in the otherwise empty room. And when we have seen all the empty girls dormitories then we must also see all the boys dormitories. And when we arrive at the depot where the games are kept, they actually start opening the gaudy boxes and explaining to me how the various games—games for the youngest of all—are played. I half thought that I would be asked to have a quick game of draughts or build a model of the Kremlin in plasticene before I was through.

The children all looked healthy and vigorous, with deep tans. The camp seemed well-run and reasonably attractive, if you could forget about the busts and statues and slogans and graphs. (At one point I said to the guide. "Would you say that statues are popular in the Soviet Union?" She replied gravely, "We are very fond of statues.") The swimming pool looked none too attractive and the manageress, interpreting my expression, remarked, "We try to change the water as often as possible but it is difficult, because of the water shortage."

We had a look at the orphans in their special quarters. They

were sitting around quietly, listening to the gramophone, and as we walked in the guide exclaimed, "Ah, what an atmosphere of gaiety we are finding here!"

"We have," explained the manageress, "to decide whether it is psychologically sound to segregate these orphans from their fellows. Since they stay for the entire duration of the camp and the others leave after a shorter visit, we feel that it is. The others are not told that these are orphans."

Now over to the isolation ward for infectious diseases. "You may enter with a light heart," says the manageress. "For in this camp the infectious diseases are none. The nurses have little to do." Once again I have to look at every untenanted cot in the ward, with the nurses glancing at me inquiringly to see if I have any comment.

While we are going the rounds a little group of children is busily assembling a mammoth bouquet of wild flowers. These are now ready for presentation and, as a circle gathers, a small girl wearing spectacles, steps smartly forward and presents them to me, at the same time delivering a shrill little speech, the burden of which is, "Please tell the children of your country that the children of the Tractor Worker Pioneers Camp at Kharkov send fraternal greetings."

## The Seventh Sky

I HAVE spent the last thirty years of my life in fairly continual travel or living abroad. Coming back to London is something which always gives me pleasure. But never have I enjoyed the return to Britain so completely, nor so deeply appreciated the everyday things of life here than after the Russian sojourn.

It is now over four weeks since my return—and I am still savouring the rediscovered delights of life in Britain. I confound my friends by refusing to join in the diatribes against the bad summer. Even in the rain, Britain looks wonderful to me.

The sheer joy of driving about a green country, with tidy fields and well-kept roads and pretty gardens; of seeing people who laugh and smile and enjoy themselves—and to whom I can talk casually when I feel like it.

Since I have been home I have goggled happily at the women—a race of goddesses tall and graceful, and all surely dressed by some Dioresque genius who dwells on Mount Olympus. How can I have ever been critical of British women in the past? Never again!

The smallest everyday things are still giving me acute pleasure here. The sights and sounds and smells of Britain seem matchless. This to one who travels thousands of miles every year in the course of his job, who has visited most of the world's countries and who thought that he long ago had grown past the days when so exciting a rediscovery was possible.

I wouldn't have missed the Soviet Union, professionally speaking. If I ever go back to have another look I shall do my best to see, ahead of time, if the authorities can't manage to help me break down the barrier that today exists between the foreign visitor and the 200 million people of the country he is visiting.

## JUST BACK FROM RUSSIA

It is a depressing experience to live surrounded by that barrier for three months. You feel a bit like H. G. Wells' invisible man, whose presence was only acknowledged by ordinary mortals when they bumped into him by accident.

If the authorities would only give the green light just once in a way, instead of insisting on this glacial sending of the visitor to Coventry, it might be possible to discover just a little of what goes on in the minds of the people. Even an evening spent with a Soviet family around their TV set, a project which I thought might have yielded fairly rich dividends, could not be managed. At every turn I was met by shrugs.

Never mind. If the trip did nothing else it has taught me to appreciate my own country as I never did before; to realize how profoundly lucky we all are to live just where we do.

At a diplomatic cocktail party in Moscow just before I left I was talking to a British official. I told him that after my Russian experiences I had taken a solemn vow—never to find fault with anything at home again.

"I took the same vow when I was a POW," he said musingly. "I am sorry to say that it wears off in time."

Perhaps it will, memory being short. But just now, like that cat down in Georgia, I am in the seventh sky!





















